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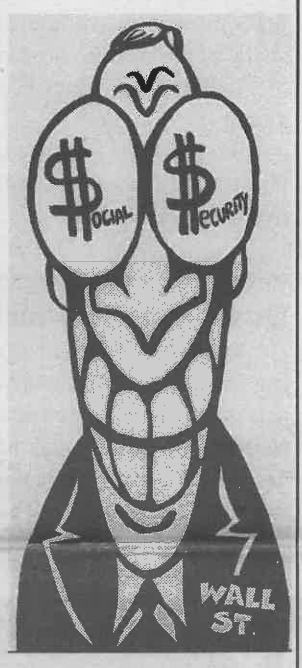
Remembering Carlos Cortez: Artist, Poet, Rebel, Wobbly
IWW editor and columnist Carlos Cortez brought joy, love to struggle for workers' emancipation **6-7**

Pizza Time workers strike, Grocery workers organize
Washington Wobblies walk the line against abusive treatment; Texas grocer fires IWWs **3, 5**

Social Insecurity

The phony pension crisis

BY EUGENE PLAWIUK, EDMONTON IWW



George Bush II announced his plan to "reform" Social Security in his State of the Union address. In true Orwellian speak, the campaign is called Securing Our Future. Of course the plan is not to increase funding for Social Security but to allow for the privatization of social security and consequently a reduction in benefits. He would do well to look east to Russia which has done just that. The consequences have been thousands of Baba's in the streets protesting against Putin.

The attack on workers' pensions and on social security is another front in the agenda of global free trade and the privatization of the state. It is occurring world wide; workers in the majority of industrialized countries are seeing attacks on both social security and on their workplace pensions. The World Bank has predicted that in the next few years, some 30 countries will initiate such reforms. Many Latin American countries already have, using Chile's model.

Politicians, the business lobby and their right-wing think tanks are now doing their best imitations of Chicken Little, running around crying the sky is falling over pensions and social security. Following their success of foisting the so-called debt and deficit crisis – during the Reagan, Thatcher, Mulroney era of the early 1990s – on the public to get us to take wage cuts and to lay off public sector workers in order to privatize the state, they are now focusing on privatizing other social benefits.

How quickly they changed their tune when it comes to debt and deficit when it affects corporate debt, which has increased, personal debt or state debt... Under George Bush ll the U.S. has amassed a trillion dollar deficit, and it is in a debt crisis over trade. But hey, nothing to worry about, says the right wing pundits, who in the nineties were proclaiming the end of the world as we know it.

What they wanted to end of course was the Welfare State, and having done it through outsourcing, reducing unemployment insurance, work for welfare, privatization of public services, reducing public health services, etc., now they cast their eyes on the goose and its golden egg: social security and pension funds.

The push to gut Social Security as well as private pension plans is just the latest item in the agenda of pernicious capitalists to get their hands on liquid capital to invest with. In order to counteract the falling rate of profit, more money needs to be circulating in the marketplace. This coincides with the United States' reliance for the past three decades on increased consumer spending versus manufacturing to prop up American capitalism.

The formula, money-commodities-money (MCM), now dominates this period of late (decadent) capitalism. It no longer requires manufacturing of goods, or land rent, to expand; it requires a liquidity of capital circulating in the market. *continued page 8*

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Unions vanishing from American workplaces

The percentage of Americans belonging to labor unions fell last year to the lowest level in more than six decades, according to a recent report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The number of union members also fell to 15.5 million, down 300,000 from 2003.

While 12.5 percent of all workers still have union representation, the percentage of private-sector workers in unions has fallen to 7.9 percent – the lowest level since the early 1900s. For the first time in recent decades, even the proportion of government workers represented by unions has declined.

In recent years, 50 percent or more of U.S. workers have consistently told pollsters they want union representation. However, a combination of fierce employer resistance, an anti-worker labor law regime, and ineffectual union organizing strategies exclude tens of millions of workers from unions.

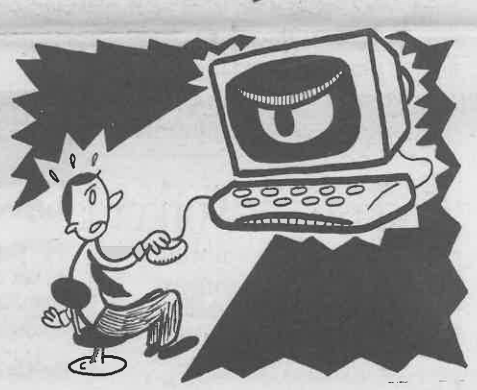
Despite decades of lost ground, union workers continue to enjoy substantially better conditions than their nonunion counterparts – a median weekly wage for full-time workers of $781 in 2004, compared to $612 paid to nonunion workers. Union workers also typically receive much better health care benefits and more paid time off. The union advantage is much larger for women, African-American and Latino workers.

Union incomes are higher not only in general, but in specific job categories as well. From construction workers to janitors, workers doing the same work earn more when they work union. However, this "union advantage" gives employers a powerful incentive to fight unionization of their work force, and to demand deep concessions from union workers in order to bolster their competitiveness.

State workers lose rights

In Indiana and Missouri, 50,000 state workers lost their right to negotiate wages, health care and working conditions when newly elected Republican governors signed executive orders rescinding union recognition and contracts. Rather than take industrial action, unions are relying on lobbying and political contributions to regain their rights – steps that thus far have been wholly ineffectual. In Maryland, Gov. Robert Ehrlich is proposing to abolish state agencies that help workers collect unpaid wages and enforce the state's prevailing wage law.

Bosses firing bloggers for griping about jobs



Companies ranging from Google and Microsoft to Delta Airlines are firing workers for discussing their jobs on Internet diaries known as blogs. There are an estimated 8 million blogs in the United States, although most do not focus on work.

Thousands of workers are creating blogs about a wide variety of jobs, from waiting tables to selling clothes to teaching. And growing numbers of them are being fired or ordered to shut their sites down.

A North Carolina newspaper fired a blogger for griping about management's lame efforts to boost morale by giving journalists certificates for good work. She did not name the paper she worked for, but her supervisors were monitoring the blog and did not like what they read.

Because most U.S. workers are considered "at will" employees, they can be fired for just about anything that annoys the boss – or for no reason at all. But employers seem to take blogging particularly seriously.

Employment lawyer Jonathan Segal told the *Washington Post* that blogging – even when done anonymously, on a worker's own time, and without identifying the employer – "is inconsistent with the business mission," and so is legitimate grounds for termination. He urges employers to adopt formal policies to make that clear to workers.

With or without such policies, the industrial carnage is mounting. Internet search engine giant Google recently forced a new employee, Mark Jen, to remove critical material from his site and then fired him days later.

Other tech firms have taken similar action. A contract worker was barred from Microsoft's campus last year after he took a picture of Apple G5 computers being unloaded there and posted it to his blog. Friendster, the online social networking operator, fired a worker in August over her Troutgirl blog.

But Google's actions drew particular attention, because it recently bought Web logging pioneer Pyra Labs and claims to put ethics before corporate profits. The company also maintains a blog site where it encourages workers to post stories about topics such as the company dog and the person who creates the site's holiday art. Jen began recording his impressions of Google on his personal blog – including a comparison of pay and benefits at Google and Microsoft, where he previously worked – when he started work there; his posts disappeared within a week at Google's insistence. When the blog reappeared, he had "voluntarily" removed material including a post explaining his reasons for creating the blog and discussing an employee orientation event. Even so, he was fired a few days later

Delta Air Lines fired flight attendant Ellen Simonetti in October after she posting photos of herself in uniform on her blog, Queen of Sky (now Diary of a Fired Flight Attendant). She has filed a discrimination complaint, noting that male employees pictured in uniform on other web sites have not been disciplined, and has launched a Bloggers Rights Movement demanding that employers let workers know if they have anti-blogging policies.

A few companies encourage blogs. Sun Microsystems invites workers to blog on company time (though it asks them to keep financial information confidential), and posts the blogs to a dedicated site where posts by line employees and Sun's president share cyberspace. The firm says blogging helps to create community.

But while the blogosphere may appear to be a democratic space, Google workers have learned the hard way that they are being listened to and that unorganized workers speak their minds only at their own peril.

Ottilie Markholt memorial

An anonymous $100 donation has been made to the IW Sustaining Fund in memory of Ottilie Markholt

Remembering Carlos Cortez and Ottilie Markholt



A bunch of us Chicago GMB alumni from the seventies got together Jan. 27 to remember our fallen fellow workers Ottilie Markholt and Carlos Cortez. We had originally planned to meet to honor Ottilie, but Carlos's death on the 18th gave us two old friends to memorialize.

We gathered at the home of former GST Kathleen Taylor, drank beer and wine, and shared memories of Ottilie and Carlos.

We remember Ottilie as a deceptively grandmotherly looking woman who was in fact a hard-nosed unionist who did much in the seventies and eighties to teach us younger fellow workers about organizing and collective bargaining, and how to keep a set of books.

Carlos, who was much closer to us, obviously, we remembered as a dedicated fellow worker who put his art in service to the cause; who was always willing to recite a poem at a benefit, design a poster or a t-shirt to raise funds and make propaganda; and, yes, embarrassed us a few times with his, shall we say, risqué *Industrial Worker* covers. He also made a dynamite pot of chili.

Let it be known that Carlos died a paid-up Wob; he paid his dues, in full, for 2005.

After much reminiscing, we passed the hat and collected $80 as a donation to the IW Sustaining Fund, in memory of Carlos and Ottilie. We would appreciate it if you could make note of this donation in the next *Industrial Worker.*

In Solidarity,
Mike Hargis

(See Centerspread, this issue, for more on the life of FW Carlos Cortez.)

Congratulations from Sweden

The Swedish anarcho-syndicalist youth federation's (SUF) 15th congress wish to extend our congratulations to our comrades of the Industrial Workers of the World for their century of struggle. With pride, the IWW can look back upon a hundred years of revolutionary class struggle which has inspired many a worker throughout the years.

We hope to never see another hundred years of struggle for the IWW, though we yearn to see the fulfilment of our goal, the end of wage slavery, much sooner. For revolution in our lifetime!

Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth Federation
Uppsala, Sweden, 23 January 2005

Flying scabs and death work

St. Louis is hooked on civil and military aviation like a junky. Bosses in the health care industry routinely use flying nurse temp services to break strikes at hospitals. Local officials (and congressmen) fall all over each other to send military contracts to St. Louis fighter airplane companies.

In summer, St. Louis is overrun with wealthy tourists who have flown in to enjoy St. Louis's shopping malls and sports stadiums (another tale of subsidies).

And yes, subsidies to civil and military aviation are popular. After all, they help business. Of course, they also help illegal businesses including drug traffickers...

The same government that increases subsidies to aviation is also cutting subsidies to mothers, poor workers, and small farmers. Why not ask the people in St. Louis's homeless shelters how much they like those big fighter jets being built in St. Louis?

Robert G. Rice

Stormy weather ahead

How do we come to grips with the wards of bluster and brazenness played out in Washington, D.C.? In its bid for a footnote in history, the Bush administration amassed $14 million to celebrate its second inauguration. Curious, this eternal child in us garbing ourselves in fancy dress to join the celebrants of a vulgar farce. And indeed there were many players in the drama flaunting flags, balloons, banners, bugles ...

... Amidst the tightest security ever. In his bullet-proof cab as the peregrination wended its way down Pennsylvania Avenue, huddled a president frightened of his people.

Protest of this obscene pageant? Yes, indeed, seven thousand protesters were tucked away where the would not disturb the *real* players in the drama.

A few black-clad, martyrdom-prone fringers broke loose from the main drag to smash windows, or to block the entrance of proper guests. Let's not call them spokesmen for the peace movement. And yet, doesn't their wrath spark an answering chord in us?

California sunshine beckons us out after a long spell of rain.

But sunshine is a token of optimism and cheer. The forecast for Washington is continued rough weather.

Dorice McDaniels, Los Angeles

Queries on former members

Wobblies who can help with the following queries received in the last month are asked to contact the editor: Information on Morris Kantor, who may have lived in New York and was active pre-World War I. Info on death of James Rowan, who led the EP split in 1924. Bylines and other info that could help identify articles written for this paper

Farewell, Fellow Worker

Axi Nue

Axi Nue joined the Philadelphia IWW in December 2003. An artist and singer, Axi was also active with a theater group, the dumpsta players. She was also interested in organizing among women who do sex work.

"Every time she came in the (IWW) office she left a reminder of her presence in the form of glitter on the surface of wherever she worked," IWW General Secretary Alexis Buss recalled. "I mentioned it to her once, and she told me that she only occasionally deliberately applied glitter to herself, but most usually the glitter found her."

Axi was diagnosed with B-cell lymphoma in the late summer of 2004. She died January 29, at age 25. She was extremely energetic and positive, even after her diagnosis and during her subsequent chemotherapy, singing at benefits with a local punk band just a few months before her death.

Around Our Union

The General Executive Board has approved shop cards for Two Degrees Coffee Shop in Madison, Wisconsin, and Ecology Action of Texas in Austin, Texas. The Central New Jersey General Membership Branch has also been chartered.

Several members of the IWW's South Street Workers Union in Philadelphia recently traveled to Brooklyn, NY, to meet with members of Make the Road By Walking, an immigrant workers center engaged in a similar organizing campaign in the Bushwick section. In addition to maintaining a district-wide grievance committee, the South Street Workers Union is also organizing against cuts to public transit.

IWW General Secretary-Treasurer Alexis Buss spoke in Cambridge, Mass., Feb. 17 as part of an event commemorating the IWW centenary sponsored by the Harvard Trade Union Program. The centenary was also featured in the Festival of Workers Culture held Feb. 18-20 in Seattle.

May Day Greetings Ads

It has for some years been tradition to run in the May *IW* greeting ads in honor of International Workers Day. Greeting Ads must be received by April 9 to run in the May issue. Suggested donation levels are $10 for a 1 inch tall ad (1 column wide); $35 for 4 inches by 4 7/8 inches (2 columns); or $80 for a quarter page. We can set it up from your message, or you can send it in camera-ready. These rates are for non-commercial greeting ads only.

We can provide extra copies of the issue at normal bundle rates.

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★ ORGANIZATION
★ EDUCATION
★ EMANCIPATION

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Fresh Plus campaign a fresh start for Austin Wobs

BY MARCUS DENTON, AUSTIN

As 2005 began in Austin, Texas, two IWW coworkers were fired for union activity, spurring a series of solidarity actions indicative of the rejuvenation in the Lucy Parsons General Membership Branch.

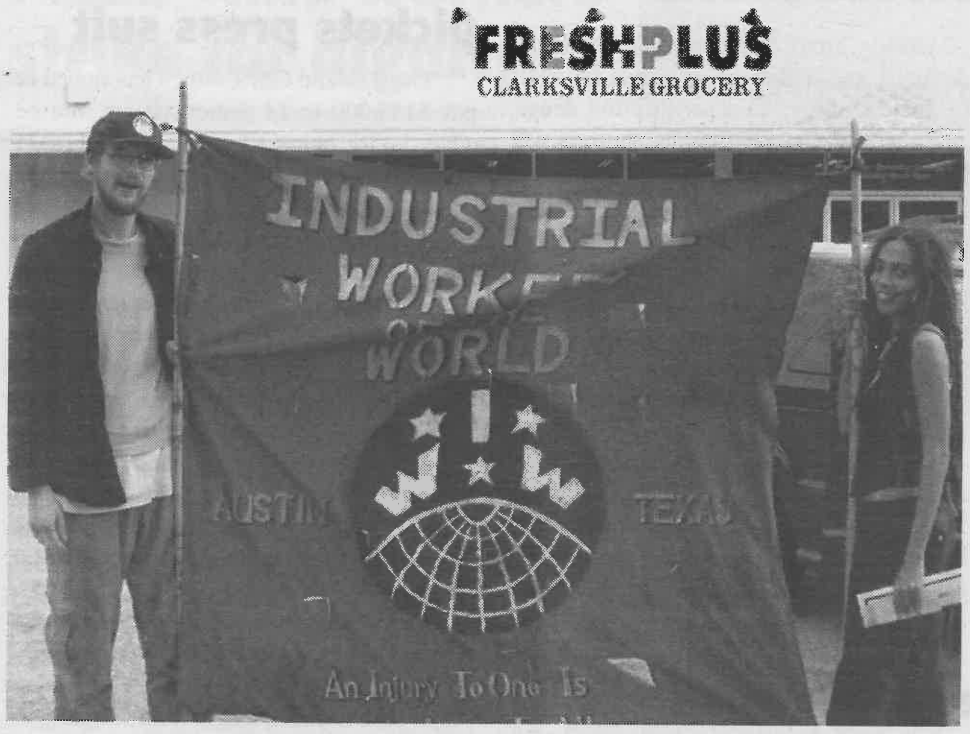
On Jan. 7, one week after the first firing, 15 Wobs showed up at Fresh Plus, the charming, independent neighborhood grocery store and flagrant union buster in question, to fight the sacking of fellow worker Ryan Hastings. Members were energized as they passed out leaflets to some of the store's 25 employees and customers inside the store, forcing supervisors to hunt around and pick up leaflets left behind. Outside, in front of the store, Wobs leafleted and talked to customers about the firing until they were asked to leave, at which point a new batch took their place.

FW Hastings worked at Fresh Plus six months before being fired, a job he says he enjoyed despite its numerous drawbacks: low pay ($7/hr), no benefits, and no sick days. "The worst thing of all, the thing people were most pissed about was our domineering, overbearing boss who frequently made mistakes in his micromanaging," he said, referring to general manager Paul Beurskens.

Hastings began agitating for a union soon after he was hired in June 2004. "Everyone was receptive to the idea of being organized and running the shop ourselves," he explained. By November he and interested coworkers were meeting, and during the first weekend of December Hastings and fellow Wobs made house visits. The following Monday Boss Paul gave Hastings his first write-up; from then on managers accused this once-commended worker of breaking numerous rules.

The other shoe finally dropped when a supervisor sent Hastings home early Dec. 27; two days later Boss Paul called to tell him not to come into work – he had been fired. Back at the protest action, the store's anti-union stance was made even clearer when the same supervisor, Nicole Warrington, sent cashier Nellie Moore home early after she spent her break passing out leaflets in front of the store. The next day Moore was written up and then fired. Since her firing no other employee has openly come out in favor of the union.

Between FWs Moore and Hastings, the Austin GMB has filed ten charges with the NLRB, including unlawful terminations and an overly broad No Solicitation policy. Our response has not been solely to rely on the NLRB, of course, and the branch's reaction to this injury to two has been exciting.



Wobs have returned several times to flier the generally receptive customers, both informally and for larger, planned events. On one humorous occasion a crowd of Wobs observed police tell an exasperated Boss Paul that they weren't going to issue a dozen or more No Trespass warnings and that he'd just have to call them again if we got back on the property after they left. On two occasions we brought out the red IWW banner, including once to lead a march of supporters from a nearby park to the store.

These actions illustrate a jump in the branch's overall activity in recent months. In addition to increased membership, another shop's brewing situation, and the Fresh Plus campaign, a long overdue Wob shop has been recognized at Ecology Action, a recycling center that fired its boss two years ago and has since been operating as a collective, with better working conditions, scheduling and pay.

Noting the upsurge, Dan Elgin, branch president, stated, "It's the first time in many years there's been a core group of Wobs wanting to organize a functioning One Big Union in Austin." But the difference is not only quantitative. "This is the beginning of a change in focus of the branch where we increase membership in the minority union context by identifying targets based on organizing industrial branches rather than responding to hot shops."

Both former Fresh Plus workers welcome the support they've received. "It's been great," Nellie Moore said. "I feel like they've been a great resource to me and I wish the other employees would recognize that." Hastings concurs. "That was an amazing feeling. It demonstrated for me that we provide mutual aid for each others' actions. There are people there who are probably going to have struggles coming up, and I'll be there for them. If any Wobs have troubles, we have a posse."

NLRB issues complaint against Wild Oats

The National Labor Relations Board has issued a formal complaint charging Wild Oats Natural Foods with illegally firing IWW organizer Tom Kappas in an effort to break the union. The IWW has been struggling to reinstate Kappas for the past seven months, turning out several nationwide pickets, a petition with over 500 supporters, and now this complaint from the NLRB.

Kappas was fired from the Cincinnati Wild Oats on July, 10, 2004; ostensibly for discounting less than two pounds of rotten produce. The produce manager gave permission to discount spoiled produce to all produce employees and then, during the firing interview, said he never approved discounts. Store director Fred Meyer then fired Tom for the discount even after he produced a receipt for the produce. Meyer initiated a random bag search policy the night before.

The labor board decision is an important step in a campaign that has recently seen Wild Oats managers make slanderous remarks about Kappas. Wild Oats has received many emails and phone calls from concerned IWW members and supporters.

There are still union supporters at the Cincinnati Wild Oats store and hopefully the NLRB decision will galvanize workers to act. They now will know that there is recourse for Wild Oats violating the rights of their workers.

The IWW job branch had been organizing at the store for better working conditions for over a year. Wild Oats responded to the union organizing with a vicious anti-union campaign aimed at dismantling the union before it got too strong. A small group of workers, including Kappas, continued to push for better working conditions, which resulted in Kappas' firing. Over the course of the organizing, workers have seen an increase in the number of grievances being remedied and received substantial pay increases and promotions.

Parry strike ends

BY X355020, PORTLAND

The strike has ended at the Parry Center (a residential treatment facility for children with severe behavioral disorders; see article, January). A new contract was ratified January 30 with a small group of no votes. The contract has minor wage improvements, and won a closed shop minus exemptions for scabs and permanent replacements.

The strike lasted two months, and saw real courage and strength on the part of the workers who had only each other. (Most had never experienced any union action before.) This was in spite of management throwing objects, hiring constant surveillance by private security, and at least four assaults with cars. Most strikers who were hit by cars were fired for "jumping on the hood" of the cars trying to cross the picket line, and yet unwilling to slow 3 seconds to wait for the picketer to cross the sidewalk. Luckily only one picketer was injured and not seriously.

The Portland IWW branch organized a solidarity night where seven Wobblies and a few strikers went to a Board member's house. We arrived at the same time as the board member, who promptly fled into his house. The group then leafleted the neighborhood, and sang labor songs in front of his house. The police never came, and we left having had a good action. Wobblies in the area have participated in actions and rallies since before the strike began, and helped keep our line strong. Thanks to all the folks who helped out!

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under $1,000, dues are $6 a month. If your monthly income is between $1,000 - $2,000, dues are $12 a month. If your monthly income is over $2,000 a month, dues are $18 a month.

- ❑ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- ❑ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- ❑ I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

Frisco grocery concessions

San Francisco Bay area grocery workers have approved a new three-year contract with the three major national chains that continues the wave of concessions being granted by the UFCW across the country.

The agreement does not include a permanent, two-tier system of wages and benefits such as agreed to in Southern California. However, new hires will receive a second-rate benefit package and will have to put in at least six years before reaching the full wages and benefits.

Under the previous agreement, journeyman clerks earned $19.08 an hour; new employees will have to work 7,800 hours to reach that level. The new contract sets up three tiers of health benefits, under which workers will put in at least six years to reach the previous level of health care benefits.

Newly hired employees face high deductibles and higher co-payments for visits to doctors' offices and prescription drugs, and new coverage restrictions. Retirees will have to pay $70 per month for health care; coverage which had been free.

Under the former contract, full-time cashiers started at $9.45 an hour, reaching top scale of $19.08 after one year. Now cashiers will start at $8.50, and work for nearly four years to earn top scale.

While new hires take pay cuts, existing workers will see their pay frozen for two years – after which the top scale will increase by 25 cents. Workers will receive a signing bonus. The contract encourages companies to offer buy-outs to veteran workers in order to cut payroll costs. About 20,000 employees are covered by the contract.

Union members barred from talks

A federal judge in St. Paul, Minn., has upheld a federal mediator's order barring an elected team of rank-and-file workers from observing union negotiations with Northwest Airlines. Like the IWW, the independent Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association requires that union members be present at all negotiating sessions. While the Railway Labor Act permits unions to choose their own "representatives" for contract talks and other purposes, U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson upheld the mediator's ruling that only paid union officials can serve in that capacity.

Talks between AMFA and Northwest, which is seeking more than $950 million in concessions from its machinists, collapsed Jan. 12 when management walked out after the union refused to exclude its 17 observers from the talks.

AMFA attorney Nick Granath notes that the case boiled down to a simple question: "Does AMFA designate its own bargaining representatives?"

He added that Northwest has permitted rank-and-file observers in past negotiations and said the practice increases the chances that members will ratify any agreement. "They get to see what their union is doing," Granath said. "That's their check."

The court ruled that the union does not have that right. The union is considering an appeal. The ruling is just the latest example of the dangers of submitting workers' fates to mediators, arbitrators, judges and anti-labor laws.

The bosses' NLRB

Chris Mitchell, a former NLRB field examiner, now works for the Alabama-based union-busting law firm of Maynard Cooper & Gale. He delivered a stern warning to state officials Feb. 10 that they need to rebut a Bureau of Labor Statistics report that shows increasing union membership in the state.

If the state's reputation as an anti-labor hell hole is weakened, Mitchell says, "All the buffalo hunters (industry recruiters) from other states will be using these bogus numbers to convince their prospects to stay away from Alabama."

Wounded anti-war pickets press suit

The Oakland City Council has agreed to pay $145,000 to 24 demonstrators injured when police opened fire on an April 2003 protest at the Port of Oakland. However, 34 other protesters and longshoremen will press ahead with their claim that police violated their rights by using excessive force to control the protest on the eve of the Iraq invasion.

The city made no effort to negotiate with the most seriously injured people, according to attorney Jim Chanin. "There was no negotiation at all. It was a take-it-or-leave-it offer." Among those whose cases the city refused to negotiate is a woman hit in the back of her right calf with a wooden projectile while leaving the port. She has racked up $80,000 medical bills thus far.

All nine longshore workers injured in the attack rejected the city's offer as inadequate.

City officials say the order to use wooden projectiles, beanbag rounds and stinger grenades to break up the picket line was given only after protesters began hurling rocks and bottles at officers. However, no witnesses support this account and a video released by the city does not show demonstrators attacking police. Many believe an anti-terrorism alert issued on the protest by the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center led Oakland police to arrive primed for confrontation.



Sri Louise was among those injured. "There's still a scar and probably permanent nerve damage," says her attorney, Michael Haddad. "The settlement offers were an insult, given what happened."

SEIU compares NLRB to Saddam regime

For seven years, the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199 (SEIU), has worked to organize Yale University hospital's service and maintenance workers. The union has more than enough union authorization cards to force an NLRB , but has held off arguing that it is impossible to obtain a fair election under current U.S. labor law.

"Saddam Hussein had elections in his country. He won all the time," said David Pickus, District 1199 vice president and director of organizing for Connecticut. "It's a stacked deck."

Instead, the union has been trying to pressure Yale into agreeing to negotiate conditions for a fair vote, recently spending a half million dollars on television ads slamming the hospital for illegally blocking the union and paying unfair wages.

Yale has responded with ads of its own, claiming that workers don't want a union and blasting the SEIU for holding up a $450 million cancer center until management agrees to its terms.

The NLRB has found that the hospital violated labor rules at least three times in the last few years, and each time Yale agreed to post a small sign on a bulletin board saying it would obey the law in the future.

Meanwhile many workers struggle to survive in the college town on wages too low even to afford rent and groceries – let alone to afford medical coverage.

St. Louis nurses lose five-week strike

BY ROBERT G. RICE II

Registered nurses at St. John's Hospital in suburban St. Louis were on strike from Dec. 15 to Jan. 21. The St. John's strike was closely watched by health care workers in the St. Louis area, as well as by hospital management, because it tested the determination of health care workers (who comprise 1 out of every 9 employed adults in the region).

The strike also drew quite a bit of media attention in St. Louis, including a hostile segment on PBS affiliate KETC's local public affairs show, "Donnybrook." Before the strike, St. John's bosses blanketed St. Louis with propagandistic radio ads claiming St. John's was "a great place to work," and featuring "interviews" with anti-union nurses.

From the beginning, the hospital set out to break the strike by employing scabs supplied by a nursing temp agency in Colorado that specializes in breaking hospital strikes.

Striker Cathy Mann told the *Industrial Worker* that the scab nurses performed poorly throughout the strike. Mann said many scabs did not know how to follow doctors' instructions for patient care. A number of "malpractice lawsuits" have been filed by former patients as a result. She said that in one instance two scab nurses sewed up a little girl's hand without using the proper "sterile technique."

Both Mann and Nurse Organizer Mike O'Neal described the strike as a failure because it ended with a contract that kept the current "open shop" system at St. John's and contained only modest pay raises, which will depress health care wages throughout the area. All former strikers contacted by the *Industrial Worker* believe that the key to breaking the strike was the use of the "flying nurses" to keep the hospital open.

Programming an activist skill

BY ERIC LEE

Long before there was LabourStart, long before unions were using the Internet, I was a computer programmer. I worked in a worker-owned and democratically run wire and cable factory, and my job was to maintain the computerized information systems. I learned to program in a language called RPG which was used on IBM computers.

The skills I learned then have proven to be of great use to me now, as an Internet activist working with unions around the world. I think the time has come for unions to begin to understand that programmers can play a vital role in our organizing and communications strategies.

These days I no longer program in RPG and haven't seen an IBM mini-computer for years. Most of my programming these days is done in a language called Perl, which is one of the two or three most popular languages for writing Web-based applications.

Many union webmasters have learned HTML, which is the language that web pages are written in, and many have learned how to use tools like DreamWeaver or FrontPage to write the HTML for them, but very few have learned a proper programming language.

Why should they?

Because these languages – and the most popular would probably be Perl, PHP and Python – allow you to do things that ordinary web page design doesn't allow.

By using such languages, you can tremendously expand the effectiveness of your website. Let me explain by example.

I was working on a website of an international organization that has affiliates in many countries. It wants to list on its website all the affiliates, by country, in alphabetical order, with their website addresses and email addresses. The last two have to be links, so



that you can just click on the name of the affiliate and visit their website, or click on their email address to automatically send a message to them. And the list changes every few weeks.

Using Perl, I was able to write a very simple script to read through a text file with all the information, sorting it and formatting it as web page. No one on the organization's staff needs to know any HTML at all – my Perl script handles all that. All they need to do is to keep their text list up to date.

That's a very small and simple example, but I think you get the idea.

If you look at LabourStart, you'll see an increasing number of interactive components to the website. There are the labour newswires, which generate syndicated content automatically, every few minutes, in different formats (JavaScript and RSS). All that is done using Perl scripts.

There's a directory of all the websites using those newswires, and a sub-directory of those which use only the new health and safety newswire. That too was written entirely in Perl.

Of course the entire back-end of the website, the giant news links database with its thousands of records in 19 languages, submitted by over 300 volunteer correspondents, is entirely coded in Perl.

So is the whole campaigning system – the generation of HTML web pages with online forms, the sending of protest messages, the counter tracking the success of a campaign – all of these are interactive scripts, written in Perl.

Okay, so I've got you convinced. Unions can make great use of languages like Perl, PHP or Python to get their websites to do a lot more than simply display some web pages. But there is a downside.

A few years ago, I suggested to a union that they make some changes to their site, which used Perl scripts. They asked their web design company, and were told that it would cost $1,500 a day to get a Perl programmer to work on the project. I was later told that this was the going market rate in Britain.

But Perl isn't rocket science; if you have a programming background, or if you just take the time and effort, you can teach yourself. I taught myself, mostly using Elizabeth Castro's terrific little book, *Perl and CGI for the World Wide Web*. (A dog-eared copy is always within reach of my computer.) And you learn by example; you download Perl scripts that are readily available and you modify them to suit your union's needs. One good source is here: http://cgi.resourceindex.com/

Perl, PHP and Python should be taught at union education centers to those webmasters who've already learned HTML and want to know more. Those of us who program in these languages should make some of our better scripts available to other unions. For example, LabourStart uses a lovely little script to count visitors to our various home pages, to show them visiting in real time, and even to show which websites they came from. A script like that could be a great alternative to the counters we often see on the bottom of union websites.

Now that unions have been using the web for a decade or more, it is time to upgrade the skills of union webmasters, to become less reliant on outside contractors (especially at the rate of $1,500 a day), and to learn to use the very best tools ourselves.

Boston bus drivers fight City Hall electronic fantasy

BY MARK WOLFF, BOSTON

Several Boston City Council members are calling for installing electronic global positioning devices on all city school buses, claiming the system is needed to help bus drivers deliver students to the right homes.

However, the bus drivers' union, United Steelworkers of America Local 8751, opposes this high-tech surveillance of their mobile workplace. Drivers say that disabled buses, inability to communicate with dispatchers, and a lack of information about the students they transport are the real problem.

The local says repairing two-way radios, properly maintaining buses, and providing drivers with rosters to match student names with addresses, would solve the problems associated with delivering the children home. The drivers have also asked for bus monitors to help control misbehavior on the buses.

USWA Local 8751 representatives say the real agenda behind the GPS system proposal by Boston City Council member John Tobin has little to do with safety, but rather is an attempt to undermine the union's collective bargaining relationship with bus operator First Student, Inc.

Some council members attempted to hold union contract talks with FSI hostage by tying GPS approval to city funding. When union members gathered in city council chambers to witness the GPS hearing last November, councillors engaged union leaders in shouting matches from the floor. Tobin, who held the gavel, maneuvered to prevent bus drivers from testifying at the hearing.

Haitian workers, who comprise a large percentage of the membership of the local, agreed that the proposal was racist – part of an attempt by some city council members to revert to Boston's pre-busing days where children walked to inadequate schools in their neighborhoods.

By the end of 2004, Local 8751 celebrated a contract victory that included wage increases and added dental and vision coverage to health care benefits. However, the GPS proposal remains as a threat.

Bus drivers are especially concerned that their rights will be severely compromised by this intrusive surveillance equipment.

An attempt has already been made to utilize video equipment to monitor students on buses, with little success. Some 3,000 incidents have been reported this year. Bus drivers run the risk of being held responsible for student misconduct even as they drive buses through narrow, congested streets.

The resulting stress from misbehaving students compounds the health risks associated with the ergonomics of driving. Often, drivers work while suffering back pain from neuromuscular problems associated with wrestling with antiquated seats, steering, and other equipment.

Whether Global Positioning Systems can actually locate buses and signal equipment problems does little to remedy the real causes of safety problems. In one incident a Haitian driver was attacked by two white parents in the Dorchester neighborhood who charged the bus complaining their child was late getting home. The shop steward commented that if the driver had a working two-way radio he could have called for help. A bus monitor would also have offered some protection, if not a witness. A GPS system would simply record that the bus was not moving, possibly setting the driver up for discipline.

Fired for drinking wrong beer

A Miller Brewing distributor in Racine, Wisc., has fired a forklift operator after a local paper published a picture showing him drinking a Bud Light at a local night club. When Isaac Aguero arrived at work after the photo's publication, coworkers told him he was in trouble because of the picture. He was then called into the manager's office and fired.

Pizza Time workers strike for dignity

BY MELISSA ROBERTS, X329953



All nine employees of the Pizza Time franchise in downtown Olympia, Washington, went on strike February 12 to protest the restaurant's hostile working environment under new ownership. The situation began Feb. 8, when workers were surprised with the sudden introduction of a new owner who initiated a litany of arbitrary, discriminatory and unprofessional policies which included firings for unjust cause, racial slurs, health violations and procedures which ensured poor product quality. The new atmosphere has left an indelible mark on the workers, who had established a remarkably cooperative working environment in today's underpaid service sector. Their response to the changes was unanimous – present a list of reasonable demands to the owner, and strike if they were not met.

When new owner Shane Bloking arrived at the franchise, he changed the locks, denied legal breaks, fired two workers, and hired his brother. The workers he fired, Abara and John, both had years of experience. Shane's brother, Jeff, had no experience, and his erratic and hostile verbal style permeated the working environment. In response to workers' questions about the firings, the owner's racial slurs suggest discrimination might be the true reason he "didn't like" one of the workers. As an "at will" state, Washington workers can be fired for many reasons (or no reason at all), but racial discrimination is still illegal.

The firings are part of an overall climate of intimidation brought by the new owner. Pizza maker, Burke Kenny, was called in to work early one day, and was denied his 10-minute break after four hours work. Workers' attempts to explain procedures to the owner's brother are routinely ignored, and sanitation, safety and product quality visibly suffer.

Customers are not the only ones unhappy with sub-standard and burnt product, the workers' pride in their work is one of their reasons for taking to the streets. Even Pizza Time Manager Alex Wentz is an active striker who supports the demands. The strike began the day Jeff opened the store in place of the regularly scheduled worker who had been fired. When drivers arrived to work at 11 a.m., they found the door locked. Jeff arrived five hours late.

The picket line includes pizza makers, delivery drivers and community supporters. The Pizza Time workers are new to workplace organizing, but fighting for their rights comes naturally to this dedicated bunch. The picket line has had a constant and visible presence and enjoyed wide community support daily, from noon to 10 p.m., since the strike began. Located on a busy downtown street, drivers honk their support and foot passengers eagerly stop for leaflets about the strike.

The new owner's response to the strike is as erratic as his business practices. The first day of the strike, Bloking closed the store. On the second day, the brothers tried to operate the franchise by themselves. The strike's wide community support suggests they could handle the workload only because business had significantly dropped. But by the day's end, Jeff Bloking told strikers that his brother had decided to stop making payments and exit the buyout contract with former Pizza Time owner and landlord, Richard Kelley. Workers were reluctant to believe their good fortune without written confirmation, so they remained on the line. On the third day, striking workers were told they were fired. The situation will be clarified when former owner Richard Kelley returns to Olympia Feb. 17.

In the meantime, striking workers are holding the line. They have successfully persuaded workers hired to replace them (a.k.a. scabs) to stop crossing the picket line.

Five of the Pizza Time Workers have joined the IWW, and all have become vocal spokespersons for workers' rights because of the situation. In a post-strike meeting, workers decided to file for an NLRB election for union certification. They agreed to represent themselves and decided to form their own labor organization – Olympia Workers' Association – for filing purposes. The Olympia GMB is actively supporting the workers, walking the picket line and helping to research legal questions.

Wal-Mart to close only union store

Wal-Mart walked away from contract talks with the union representing workers at its store in Jonqière, Quebec, after just nine sessions, saying they would close the store in May rather than agree to arbitration. The announcement came hours after the government announced it was appointing a mediator, and is the first Canadian Wal-Mart to close for any reason.

"Wal-Mart has decided to go very hard against the union," said Christian Lévesque, a professor of labor relations at HEC Montreal, a business school. "The union must now show the workers that it will support them whatever Wal-Mart does. If it takes just a legalistic approach, it's dead."

However, the UFCW, which also has recognition at a Wal-Mart in St-Hyacinthe, responded by filing a complaint with the Provincial Labour board and posting an online petition asking management to reconsider. Wal-Mart is facing certification requests at a dozen other stores in Quebec, Saskatchewan and seven Wal-Mart Tire & Lube Express departments in British Columbia.

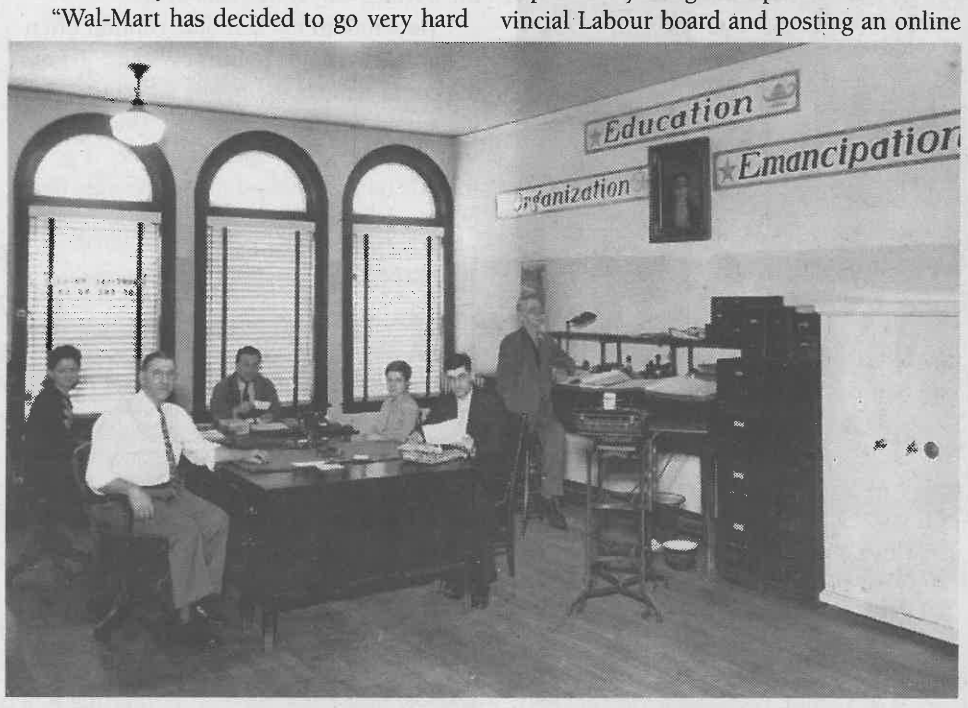
Quebec labor law does not bar management from shutting down a facility in order to break a union. "In terms of the labour code, there is no recourse the minister can take regarding a decision by a company to close," Labour Ministry spokeswoman Josée Delisle told reporters. "It's an unfortunate situation for the [local] population and the workers."

Wal-Mart Canada spokesman Andrew Pelletier claimed the store had failed to meet financial goals, which he declined to specify. He suggested that workers' decision to unionize was the final straw. "The situation has continued to deteriorate since the union. The store environment became very fractured..."

Days after the Jonqière announcement, the UFCW lost a Feb. 11 election at a New Castle, Penn., Tire & Lube department after four and a half years waiting for a union vote in a campaign originally prompted by safety concerns. The delays followed unfair labor practice charges filed by the union over illegal surveillance and harassment of union activities, transfers of union supporters, and improved conditions meant to undercut support for union membership. The NLRB delayed the election while Wal-Mart dragged the ULPs through its Byzantine processes.

An election is pending at a Wal-Mart tire department in Colorado, though Wal-Mart has threatened to appeal the determination that that was an appropriate bargaining unit. The UFCW filed for that election with only the thinnest of majorities, and so any delays would likely prove fatal.

Meatcutters at a Texas Wal-Mart voted in 2000 to be represented by the UFCW; Wal-Mart responded by eliminating that job category company-wide. A petition to unionize 19 Wal-Mart Tire & Lube Express workers in California was withdrawn in 2001 after long NLRB delays eroded union support.



The IWW: 1905 - 2005

IWW headquarters in Chicago, circa 1945. Left to Right: Alice Westman, Walter Westman, Charles Velsek, Jennie Velsek, Fred Thompson and John Russell.

A photo of the Industrial Workers of the World headquarters in Chicago around 1945. A smaller union after the criminal syndicalism trials and the persecutions of the 1920s and 1930s, the IWW retained a core of individuals who never gave up the ideals expressed at the founding of the IWW in 1905.

The photo of Joe Hill on the wall of the headquarters is currently is on display at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs. In addition, the archives has the historical papers of Alice and Walt Westman, Charlie and Jennie Velsek, and Fred Thompson.

Many other personal collections of Wobbly historical materials are housed at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Anyone interested in the collection, or interested in adding to it should contact William LeFevre at the Archives at telephone number 313-577-2789 or by email at William.LeFevre@Wayne.Edu.

Sun sets on Red Cloud and a coyote howls

BY GARY COX

C. C. Red Cloud, Koyokuikatl (song of the Coyote in the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs), and X321826 were just a few of the many noms de plume that Carlos Cortez used in his many Left Side columns, poems, cartoons and drawings that we enjoyed in the *Industrial Worker* since Carlos joined the IWW in 1947. He joined shortly after serving 18 months of a two-year sentence in Sandstone federal prison in Minnesota for his refusal to take any part in the killing of other working people during the second world gang fight for power and wealth.

Carlos told me that he began using the symbol of Koyokuikatl after his imprisonment in Sandstone, where he could hear the coyotes singing at night through his cell window. To him, and most western Indians, the coyote is a symbol of a wise trickster and of freedom. The taunting howls at midnight reminded him that he was more free in there than those who blindly followed the orders of the state. He would be released shortly. It was many of the guards who would serve a life sentence at Sandstone.

Carlos listened once more to the taunts of his cousins early in the morning on January 18, 2005. This time he returned to them. He was tired of the pain in his old, weak heart and he missed his beloved wife, Marianna, terribly. She left her human form in 2001. He was devastated because she had promised to go last so she could take care of him.

Carlos had suffered serious heart problems since 1981. After she departed, there was no one to discipline him when we opened his Wild Turkey bottle for our evening ritual. "Carlos, one is enough." "But, Marianna, Gary is here all the way from Colorado. We must be polite." She would come in, wink at me, pour our glasses full one last time, take the bottle, pinch his cheek and leave. "What can you do with a Greek," he would say with a sparkle in his eye. Marianna, he never let anything dominate him. He could always limit himself, but there was no fun in that...

Carlos did not fear returning to his mother earth. In one of his books of poetry, "de Kansas a Califas," he wrote:

Tumbleweeds
When the Tumbleweed
Has finished his days of existence,
The roots that bind him down
To Earth Mother
Give way
And he can go wherever
The wind takes him.

How much better
Than a tombstone
And the Pearly Gates!

We never forget

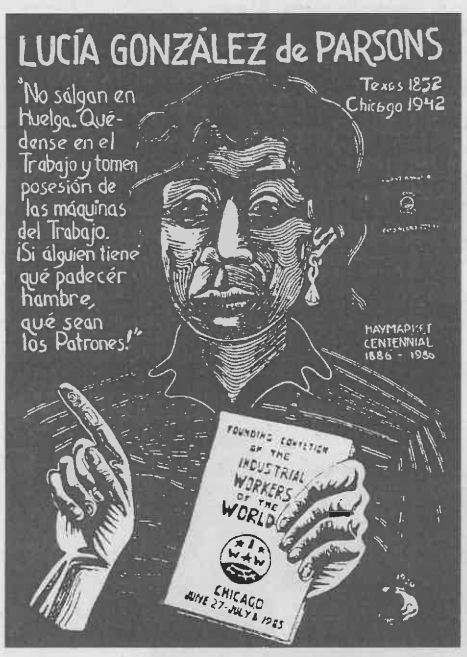
Carlos came to Colorado in 1989 to introduce the last of Joe Hill's ashes to the five IWW miners murdered in 1927 during a clash on the picket line at the Columbine coal mine near Erie, Colorado, just a few miles north of my home. We were dedicating a new tombstone over the graves of these miners and Carlos had ridden the train out as the official representative of the IWW. These were Wobblies buried here and we had promised them a headstone in 1927; but the union was broke and the promise was lost in the sadness of the government attacks on the IWW. Carlos came to keep that promise 62 years later. We Never Forget.

Carlos stayed with us while in Denver for this week-long event. Carol and I walked him out to our local prairie dog colony one afternoon. He loved them and couldn't stay away. I caught him chanting to his cousins to leave these cute pups alone. Carlos felt related to all living things, but especially these guys and his coyotes. If I wanted to hear his voice, which was often, I would send him a picture of a little fat prairie dog.

I have never met a more gentle and honest man in my life. What you saw is what you got. I first met Carlos at the first IWW convention I ever attended in 1970, and like many before and after me, he became a close friend. If he could be labeled, I think only "friend" sticks to him long. Any time I visited his home near Lincoln Park in Chicago, there were friends dropping in from all over the country and each was made to feel at home. As his caretaker his last few months, Steve, told me on the phone a few days after Carlos left, "They did not come because they liked him. They came because they loved him." I know I did.

His home had been a mom-and-pop grocery store at one time. The front room, which was the store, is now a huge art gallery, library containing his many books, a dining table, and welcome room for the many guests and anarchistic conversations that they brought with them. Those walls hold many warm memories. In the basement is Carlos' old press. El Gato Negro was producing papers here many years ago and lately his many wood block art pieces and linocuts which we are all so familiar with. In the back, where the owners of the grocery store used to live, are miles of bedrooms. There always seemed to be enough for any Wob passing through.

Carlos did not want this home. He did not like the idea of owning anything. But Marianna had other plans. When Carlos brought her to Chicago as a new bride, she made up her mind. She worked hard, sometimes three jobs doing backbreaking work. She saved until she chose this home to buy from the money she had rat-holed. Carlos loved and respected her so much that he gave in and brought his brushes and printing press — and all his compañeros. Carlos identified with his Indian side because he decided that the communal spirit of the Indian and their care-taking attitude towards Mother Earth was closest to his true nature. But he made his nest here on the Northside, nevertheless.



Born into the IWW

Carlos was born of loving, tolerant parents. His father was a Mestizo from Mazatlan, Mexico, who emigrated to the U. S. with his parents as a child. Born in Mexico in 1880, Alfred E. Cortez grew up in California. He joined the IWW free speech fight in San Diego in 1912 and joined the IWW in 1916. He was a construction worker who spoke five languages. Carlos' mother, Augusta, was born to immigrant German parents in Racine, Wisconsin. She belonged to the Socialist Party of America and was a strong supporter of Eugene Debs. Alfred and Augusta were married in 1921 and Carlos was born in 1923, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

I would say we could call Carlos a red baby. Carlos loved his father and his finely chiseled, dark Indian features; but his artistic bent, as well as his pacifism, were inherited from Augusta. Carlos joined the Young People's Socialist League as a young man, but after his prison tour found party politics entirely too confining and he joined the IWW in 1947. He identified himself as an anarcho-syndicalist from that point until answering the coyotes' call at 81 years of age.

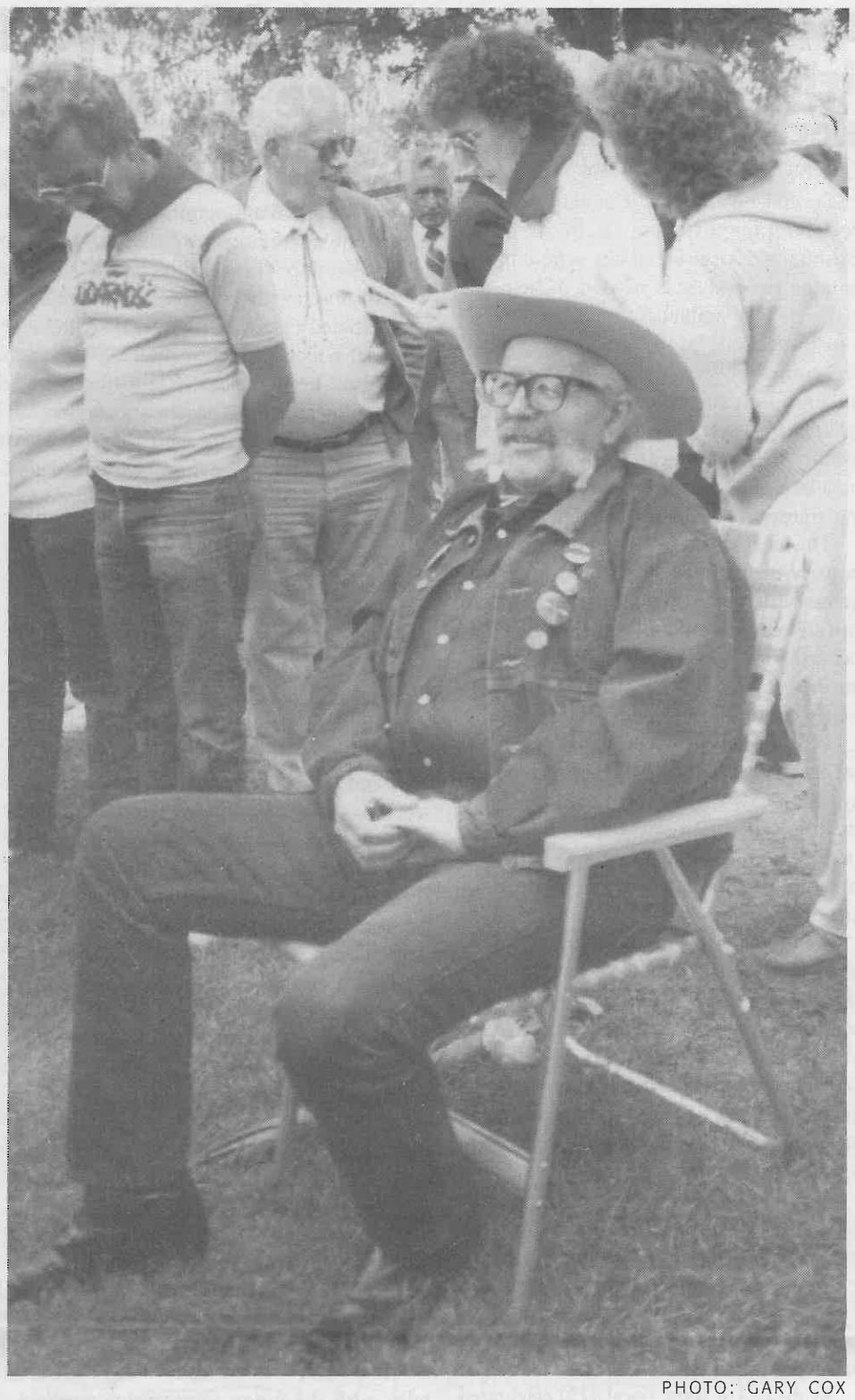


PHOTO: GARY COX

Carlos Cortez at the Columbine mine memorial ceremony, Colorado 1989

He wrote in his Left Side column often of his distrust of the political system. "If voting could remove the power structure, voting would be declared illegal." Think about that. He voiced his opinion and let it go at that. He rarely chastised anyone because they believed differently. He took anarchism seriously and allowed you your space to be free.

He had grown up in a home where his father believed strongly in anarcho-syndicalism, although Alfred always voted the Socialist ticket in case it would help someone who was homeless even a little, while his mother was an avowed member of the Socialist Party of America. Carlos said they never split hairs and always defended one another. He learned tolerance from them. Carlos mentioned very often to me as we sat out on his sidewalk with our traditional shot of Wild Turkey and a hand-rolled cigarette in the heat of Chicago's summer evenings, waving at the neighbors who loved him also, especially the youngsters, that until the IWW could imitate that kind of respect and tolerance for one another, it would have a difficult time holding conventions of any merit.

We talked of many things on his front steps under the influence of the flopping turkey and sometimes a moon. We talked of why we loved the IWW. We both felt that violent revolution was bound to fail, even if it could be won; that political results could provide, at best, short temporary relief for the underbelly, but nothing permanent; and that there was the danger of false hopes for real change in those who voted. We both believed in the ability of workers to control their own lives, and, if tolerance is learned, the ability of small independent democratic units to encourage just that.

Carlos began using the symbol of Koyokuikatl after his imprisonment in Sandstone, where he could hear the coyotes singing at night through his cell window. To him, and most western Indians, the coyote is a symbol of a wise trickster and of freedom. The taunting howls at midnight reminded him that he was more free in there than those who blindly followed the orders of the state.

Who but the IWW fosters this philosophy? Many join the One Big Union for romantic reasons but we have remained Wobblies this long because we truly believe that this union offers real potential for workers to free themselves of the indignity and repression of capitalism (state or laissez faire) by simply withdrawing our labor en masse and believing in ourselves. Evidently, the powerful agree with us or the Palmer Raids and Judy Bari's car being bombed would not have been necessary.

It is believing in ourselves and learning tolerance for the opinions of others that are hard. Withdrawing labor is a pleasant task. Carlos would leave us that challenge, I think. After Marianna left, we were sitting out front on folding chairs on my last visit in August of 2004. The moon appeared through the trees. He looked up and howled quietly. I knew he didn't want to wait long.

Few artists are honored while they live, but Carlos has been bombarded with praise,

especially recently. He has taken the cause of liberation and the IWW to many neighborhoods in Chicago, to many states of the union, and to many countries of the world. In October 1999 he was honored with an exhibition of his art in Madrid, Spain, by the Foundation of Libertarian Studies. They produced a very nice pamphlet of Carlos' art with his self-portrait from 1985 on the cover.

In 2001, he was honored in Chicago by the Mexican Fine Arts Center with a large three-month-long exhibition of his art. Then all of his art was permanently hung in the Mexican Fine Arts Museum in Chicago with the promise that if his art becomes too expensive for working people, they must produce more to reduce the price. Those who profit from his passing beware visits from owls, coyotes or ravens.

In August of 2004, at the opening of The House of the Culture of Meztizo Art at 1440 West 18th in Chicago, Carlos' work was featured and the show was called, "El Coyote Vive." I was at his home when they were planning this exhibition. Judging from the light in his eyes, this one meant the most to him. He was getting very weak and he knew it might be his last. It was a new local gallery, the artists involved were close friends, and it was a more working class gallery. They were so good to him. They tried many ways, with Steve's welcome help, to get him to poetry readings for children, for example.

His art was compared to some of the greats, like Diego Rivera. I am no art critic, but I liked his art and poetry very much. First, I was amazed to watch him carve his images backwards into wood. This was an old art form for posters – working class because it was cheap. Carlos delighted in producing his art from scrap others had thrown away. He tried to protect his mother earth right to the end. Something about the simple black and white images holds the eye, but even more, the images were always about humanity. They needed no explanation. A father and mother bent over a flag-draped coffin. I have this one on my wall now as I type this. It will be current until capitalism strangles itself. Farm workers bent in the fields under a burning sun with a map of Texas on the sun. Need any explanation? Or his empty jail cell at Sandstone prison. Children looking up at a large poster of "their uncle" Sam who points his finger saying, "I Want You."



In his book of poems," Where Are The Voices?" referring to the Haymarket Martyrs, he wrote;

Houn' Dog

Trotting along the sidewalk
with not a feline in sight
to give chase to
and not a girl doggie in sight
that he can pursue
but just as happy
as only a houn' dog can be,
he espies the recruiting poster
in front of the post office.
His tail stops wagging long enough
as he cranes his head forward
to make the sniff test
and upon seeing that it
does not sniff too well,
with excellent body english
and a back paw salute,
he administers upon this artifact
of an alleged higher creation,
his most eloquent appraisal.

We, the working class of the world, have lost a great friend and mentor. That long and mournful howl you heard was mine or it was Carlos' answer. Join me. Let King George hear it!

Hopefully, the IWW can find a way to exhibit his art and poetry around the U.S. as part of the 100th celebration. He served this union almost 60 of those 100 years. What cha' think, Wobs?

A life of cheerful struggle

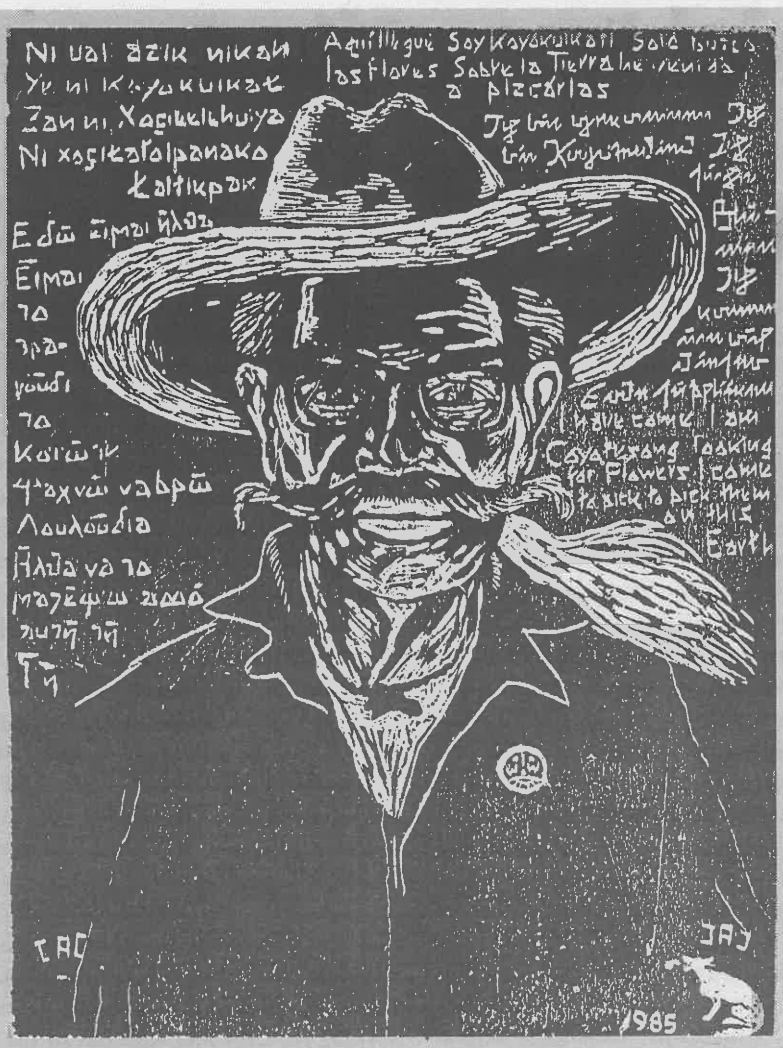
BY STEVE GALL

I have had the most unique opportunity to share a home with Carlos for the last three years and some weeks. During that time I have become Carlos's full-time caretaker. However, I must credit others who have also been there. Among them, Marta Alva, Lydia Mendoza, and especially Amparo Sanchez who had been a stalwart care-giver and friend to Carlos since I moved in in January of 2002. Another friend, Claudio Gaete, would stay over at the house several nights a week to help provide for Carlos. We'd enjoy cocktail hour, time for music, jokes, and lots of laughs and musings. Together we were "tres cabasuedos," three hard heads. As it has been both an honor and privilege to have been so close to Carlos for this time; it has also been a gift to me to have been his friend and for me to call him "Abuelo," grandfather.

The aforementioned women were all day-time care-givers who would stay with Carlos between the hours of 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. while I pursued work as a carpenter and handyman. Amy would arrive on Saturday's with a bag of tamales fresh from a vendor. To which Carlos would inevitably reply "Andoleé!" That's how it was with Carlos – life was not met with complaint, but of cheer. Each day was greeted with the satisfaction of the basic pleasures that only good companionship, a good smoke, coffee, good food and conversation could provide. Of all the people I met, it was Carlos Cortez who 'honed' in me how important life was and how conversation was key to enjoying life as it is – regardless of the world around us, and perhaps because that same world cannot be changed without the enigmatic communication between people.

In an effort to offer an understanding of our relationship, and to look up to Carlos's empathy for a universal call to all people, I wanted to come up with a concise statement akin to his often quoted "Draftees of the World Unite – You Have Nothing to Lose But Your Generals." One morning I presented to Carlos my statement with which I would hope to tell him in a concise manner what he had taught me over the course of our friendship. The statement is as follows: "Real Men and Women Stand Up and Demand the Truth. Fools Settle for Fiction." To which he slowly nodded his head while drawing smoke from his morning cigarette.

As I said earlier, it was a unique opportunity to have shared the last three years with Carlos. And with his passing to the "spirit world" my life will not be the same, but it will be better for the conversations we have had and for what he has taught me – simply by being who he is – Carlos Cortez.



Carlos Cortez's Final Statement

I continue... I continue to be observant of those ideals set before me in the pro-action example of my dearest mother and father. A racially mixed couple, they alerted me to the very necessity of workers rights – an ambition which has been the seed that drew into my determined efforts these many years. A task I would have been able to perform as I have done without the enduring love for my wife Marianna and her great love for me. In her passing I continue – for our love and Marianna's love of people. Our home had always been under an "open door" policy providing us the friendship of many.

I have been fortunate in my long life to have been provided many opportunities to advocate for, and bring attention to, the plight of the varied cultures of the 'disadvantaged class' – most notably, indigenous people. How they have fought and remain fighting for their rights under the hand of their respective governments.

Over the years I have submitted articles, essays and critiques on behalf of the 'disadvantaged class' to the *Industrial Worker*. A central collection point for the comprehension of that struggle for workers all over the world.

In my art, mainly block printing, and poetry I have attempted to convey the elegant nature of the 'disadvantaged class' as they face the brutality set upon them by those who would hope to suppress them and separate their spirit from its cultural genesis.

Today, though my health is frail, my spirit has not been separated from those ideals of my parents and I continue. I continue...hopefully, for some time to come. I continue to participate in various meetings concerning both artistic and social issues. There are my on-going commitments to read my poetry or demonstrate my woodcuts. I still want to provide my influence in support of the genesis for those who continue to struggle and for those who are about to become aware of it. It, being the struggle of the 'disadvantaged class' of which I have been a part of these many years, and continue my participation in.

¡La Lucha Continua! – Carlos Cortez, September 14, 2004



A warm heart and an open mind

BY COLIN BOSSEN, X347979

Carlos was a great man and I am honored to have known him. He approached the world with a warm heart and an open mind. According the Hasidim there are 36 secret Zaddikim – holy men, women and teachers – whose small actions of kindness and lives of holiness assure the continued existence of the world. It seems to me that Carlos just may have been one of those Zaddiks. I know I learned a lot about what it means to try and live dedicated to the struggle for justice by watching and listening to him.

Once I visited Carlos with a friend of mine who preferred to speak Spanish. After telling him about her own child she asked him if he had any children. He smiled broadly and said "solamente hijos espirtuales," only spiritual children. When he said that I'm sure he meant those who believed in a better world and struggled to make it so. I'd like to consider myself one of them; I'm sure many of you would as well.

I had the honor of collecting Carlos' last union dues. I am sure he'd like everyone to know that his membership in the IWW is paid in full. Farewell, Fellow Worker.

Social Insecurity...

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But even this will only be a temporary skid on the falling rate of profit, because capitalism world wide has hit a wall of overproduction and overcapacity.

Liberalizer Jose Piñera enthuses: "The Chilean experience provides a powerful lesson for free traders around the world. Trade liberalization does not take place in a vacuum; the proper overall economic and cultural climate is essential. Choice as implemented in Chile, between the government-run pay-as-you-go system and one of personal retirement accounts, not only has solved the Social Security crisis ... but also has made more possible trade and economic liberalization by linking the fate of the workers' retirement funds to that of the overall economy."

This then is the true face of Free Trade. The industrialized countries open up their borders for the free flow of capital, as productive labour is outsourced to the newly industrialized areas of the world. Underdeveloped economic zones are seen as investment and production opportunities while factories and manufacturing are reduced in North America, Europe, Japan and the other older industrial countries.

In those countries workers are laid off, outsourced, or privatized. This frees the capitalist from having to pay benefits or wages. The capitalist state now models the market place, there is no civil society only the perpetual market place. The state has benefited by outsourcing services, freeing itself from unions, wage increases and benefits including unemployment insurance, health care and pensions.

Corporations melt into air

Corporations are free to declare bankruptcy and throw their workers out onto the street, while stealing their pension funds in order to refinance their amazing resurrections. WorldCom may have collapsed but through the magic of the marketplace, it has reappeared again, as it once was, as MCI.

Air Canada demanded its workers take huge roll backs in wages, and it too wanted to gut their pension plans, in order to attract investors while in bankruptcy. Stelco Canada has done the same thing, and it goes on and on around the industrialized world – corporations that were solid one day, "melt into the air" the next, as Marx said.

Private sector pension funds have regularly been underfunded by corporations in order to invest on the stock market, usually purchasing back their own shares, and grant excessive salaries and stock options to their executives. A case in point is Air Canada, which demanded workers give up salaries and pensions while rewarding its executive with enormous payouts while in bankruptcy. While creditors and banks collect on their monies from the bankrupt corporation, its workers are left broke and out in the cold. The NDP's "Worker's First Bill" (C-281), is a social democratic attempt to address this problem in Canada.

No wonder Wal-Mart is the largest employer in the U.S. It *is* the ideal free trader. Non-union, low-waged, flexible work time, personal benefit plans for health care and pensions, which the worker pays for themselves, goods purchased offshore from China and other outsourcing countries, just in time shipments... Wal-Mart is the poster child for America adapting the Chile model of free trade and privatized benefits.

Wal-Mart is the poster child for America adapting the Chile model of free trade and privatized benefits...

The current crisis in private benefit plans and pensions being underfunded as well as underfunding of state social security plans is a crisis of capitalism, one that supposedly doesn't exist in the so called "boom economy." The crisis is not of lack of funds, but of capitalists who see cash sitting idle, wanting to get their hands on it to have it circulating in the economy for their benefit. They have used their liquidity to invest in the boom and bust stockmarket, and in most cases the returns have been a bust, according to a survey by investment banker Deloitte Touche.

In Canada while social security is stable due to increased payroll taxes introduced in the nineties, the government is still talking about ending "forced retirement" ala the Chile model. "Allowing" workers to work longer is a campaign now ongoing in the media pushed by the new Liberal government. Working past 65 might be ok if you are a shipping tycoon like our current prime minister, but if you work in a physically demanding job, early retirement means you may actually to live long enough to enjoy it.

The Free Trade agenda is to privatize all state benefit plans – to force us to work pay for our own health care, extended care, pensions and even unemployment insurance – in order to have money circulating in the system as widely as possible. It will benefit the banks and their insurance companies, who will provide us our private benefits. Civil society ceases to be what it once was as we all become indentured servants not only to our employers but to financial monopolies for our benefits.

GE investments which owns NBC and a variety of conglomerates had a profit because of its investments, not because of sales. GM only reported a profit because of its credit business, not because of car sales. With access to more liquidity from pension funds, financial institutions will continue to merge with each other and with manufacturing and industrial sectors at an increasing rate.

The Big Lie fed to workers is that RRSPs (in Canada), IRA and 401k in the U.S., or any other private pension fund, is that they are more effective in saving money for your retirement than a defined pension plan at work or social security. Actuarial accounting proves they are not.

As Paul Krugman wrote in the Feb. 4 *New York Times*, "For years, privatizers – including Mr. Bush – have claimed that people would do better with private accounts than with traditional Social Security even if they played it safe and invested in U.S. government bonds (which yield 3 percent after inflation). But the official at the briefing made it clear that his boss was fibbing: if you invested your private account in government bonds, you would face benefit cuts equal in value to your investment, so you would be no better off than under the current system."

A report issued in 1999 by the actuarial accounting firm William Mercer comparing RRSP investments and the Canadian Pension Plan showed that for a retired couple living on a combined CPP and Old Age Security annual pension of $25,000 it would take over $300,000 in RRSP investments to earn enough interest to match that. This puts the issue in a whole new light. Even with the so-called secret of compound interest, what average worker can save that much? Especially when the average worker in Canada does not have an RRSP even now. Those who have RRSPs, which are a tax break until cashed in, are all in the higher income brackets.

The Free Trade agreements are one small aspect of the shift of capitalism from production to (financial) services. We now face the continual threat that the world we now live in will soon look like that one our parents lived in prior to World War II. And of course those who lived through those times of capitalist depression are almost all gone now. Capitalism is counting on the social amnesia produced by its media fixation with the here and now for us to forget that the Welfare State was not something given to us, but a reform created to avoid a social revolution after WWII.

Every struggle to hold onto wages and benefits cuts into the profits of capitalism, profits that it needs like a junkie needs heroin. Every struggle to make the bosses pay out of the surplus value we create, is a battle in the class war. And the capitalists understand this better than anyone. The right wing declare the least resistance to their plans as 'class war' while the social democrats and trade union leaders will do their utmost to assure them it isn't so.

Class struggle is more than petitions and bills in parliament, it is the refusal to accept the way things are. It is the seizure of factories that stand abandoned in Quebec, Argentina, or Lesotho. It is a global general strike, when capital tries to close a factory in one country to ship jobs elsewhere. It is the refusal to accept empty office spaces when people go homeless. It is the global rent strike against landlords and profiteers.

It is our morality against the "morality of the marketplace." Free trade is the privatization of all aspects of civil society. The global business agenda has been declared, no na-

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U.S. workers still losing ground

Although 2004 was the first year since 1999 to see job growth in every single month, wages lost ground against inflation. Average hourly wages for nonsupervisory workers increased by just 2.1 percent, the lowest level since the government began collecting this data in 1964 and well behind the 2.7 percent inflation rate. Changes to health and pension benefit plans mean many workers were hit particularly hard last year.

Meanwhile, millions of workers continue a desperate scramble to find work. While the number of workers filing new claims for unemployment benefits hit its lowest level in more than four years in February, the number of workers receiving benefits rose by 47,000 to a seasonally adjusted 2.737 million. Millions more are excluded from jobless benefits because they did not earn or work long enough in their previous jobs, or because their benefits have run out.

Since the start of the recession in March 2001, a negligible 62,000 jobs have been added in the U.S. economy – not nearly enough for the tens of thousands of new workers who enter the job market each month. Private sector jobs are still down by 703,000. This represents the worst job performance since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting monthly jobs data in 1939.

Although the official unemployment rate is down to 5.2 percent, this decline is due not to new jobs but to a fall in the labor force participation rate to its lowest level since May 1988. This translates into 3.4 million people who have given up looking for work and so are no longer considered unemployed.

And millions of unemployed receive no benefits. For example, only 42 percent of unemployed residents in New York state collect unemployment insurance, according to the National Unemployment Law Project. Low-income workers are hit particularly hard by benefit restrictions. New York City residents who lost jobs paying over $22.46 an hour were more than twice as likely to receive jobless benefits than those whose previous jobs had paid less than $8 hourly.

A report issued by the National Low Income Housing Coalition provides a glimpse into the reality faced by millions of low-wage workers. The Coalition says there are now only four counties in the country (three in Illinois and one in Florida) "where a person or a household working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year at the prevailing minimum wage can afford even a one bedroom apartment." In more than two-thirds of U.S. cities, workers would have to put in 80 hours a week just to pay rent on that apartment.

New York City daycare workers crushed

New York City has reached a contract with the union representing 7,000 day care workers after nearly five years of negotiations in which employees worked without a contract or a raise.

The agreement gives current workers – who average about $24,000 a year in one of the world's most expensive cities – an immediate 12 percent raise and an additional 2 percent in April. They will also receive a signing bonus of $1,000 each, instead of the years of back pay workers had been demanding.

The union agreed to deep concessions, including an 11 percent reduction in starting pay, sick time and vacation time.

In announcing the deal, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg praised AFSCME District Council 1707 for engaging in "serious negotiations" instead of creating a commotion in the streets. However, the unions he criticized did not go nearly five years without a contract, and won better pay hikes.

The contract met with fierce opposition from union president Brenda Stokely, who was removed from her position by DC 1707 Executive Director Raglan George in January. Stokely and two fired union staffers have filed suit, alleging that they were removed because of their opposition to the contract and because they were outspoken against the occupation of Iraq and supported the Million Worker March.

"Raglan George removed us in an attempt to silence rank and file voices in the union," said Stokely. "Raglan George wants to silence us because we have been outspoken critics of the contract he is pushing that would give up five years of retroactive pay, while he requested a raise for himself from $70,000 to $150,000... This is an attempt to silence dissent, squash free speech, and shut out participation by rank-and-file members."

U.S. steelworker deaths and injuries on the rise

As the U.S. steel industry rebounds, it is killing growing numbers of workers. The United Steelworkers of America says at least 15 deaths (up from four deaths in 2003) were reported last year in steel-related operations. Injuries per man hour worked also increased last year after a four-year decline. At least three workers were killed in January 2005.

Under recent USWA contracts, steel companies won flexibility to move workers around to different jobs and increase the pace of production. That flexibility turns out to be a life-threatening proposition for many workers. Today, a less experienced work force that does not know how to protect itself is being frantically driven by supervisors trying to set new production records. Instead of improving safety practices, many companies are firing workers involved in accidents.

Fight for shorter Hours



Eight hours is enough

Workers at Ford's Windsor, Ontario, engine plant have unanimously voted to forgo lucrative overtime in an effort to force the company to recall laid-off workers.

Nearly 330 members of Canadian Auto Workers Local 200 are on layoff, and Ford planned to lay off 100 more workers. Those plans now are on hold, said Mike Vince, president of Local 200, which represents 5,000 workers at the engine complex.

"We're trying to get the company and some of our members off 12-hour workdays, seven days a week," Vince said. The vote came after laid-off workers made a plea to active workers in a union meeting.

"We've got people in some areas who are working 12 hours a day, seven days a week, constant," Vince said. "And still we have people on layoff, both in production and skilled trades. We've said to the corporation, this is unacceptable."

NYC construction unions accept 10-hour days

The New York City Building & Construction Trades Council reached a Project Labor Agreement with the city schools Jan. 6 that would allow contractors on school construction jobs to work 10-hour days at straight time. New York construction workers won the 8-hour day in March 1890, and have worked a 7-hour day since 1936.

The PLA also slashes the number of holidays, replaces time and a half for Saturdays and double time for Sunday and holiday work with a 5 percent differential, and gives up a 10-minute morning coffee break won in the 1960s.

The agreement also surrenders the union shop, allowing nonunion contractors to work union job sites as long as they agree to pay union scale and allow union members to apply for the work.

The deal was held up for several weeks by construction electricians. Members of IBEW Local 3 are the only unionized construction workers in New York City who still have the right to vote on their contracts, and they voted against the concessions last November – effectively vetoing the deal. But their officials brought the contract back again in December, pressuring workers into approving the same rotten sell-out they had voted down weeks before.

Under prevailing standard clauses in many New York union contracts, these conditions could be extended citywide.

Union officials say the deal is necessary to increase the share of school board work done by union contractors. If union workers can be had as cheaply as nonunion ones, the thinking goes, the bosses are more likely to go union. This, they say, will make union organizing easier. And perhaps it will, if the objective is to sign up bosses. What it does for workers is harder to see.

French workers protest govt. attack on 35-hour week

Nearly a half-million workers joined marches and rallies across France to protest government plans to "reform" the country's 35-hour work week. Despite the protests, the French National Assembly approved legislation Feb. 9 allowing employers to "ask" workers to put in up to 220 hours a year of overtime (up from the present 180).

Overtime will still officially be voluntary, but workers can be asked to put in up to 13 hours a week of overtime and pressured to "sell back" the overtime rather than take compensatory time off. Unions note that in practice, few workers will be in a position to refuse the bosses' demands for extra work. The reforms will not apply to public sector workers, who mounted three days of strikes against them in January.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin says the aim is to restore the work ethic in France. The government claims the shorter work week keeps unemployment high by making it too expensive to hire workers; surveys indicate that 69 percent of the French public wants to keep the 35-hour week intact.

11-hour days for U.S. truckers

The Bush administration is asking for public comment on a proposal allowing employers to force truck drivers to spend up to 11 straight hours on the road without rest. That is an hour longer than under previous rules; a similar change was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals last August.

About 5,000 fatal crashes involving big trucks occur annually in the United States.

The Transportation Dept. says the new rules would reduce fatigue-related crashes by "minimizing the 'deleterious effects' of sleep deprivation and cumulative fatigue."

Unions, insurance companies and safety groups oppose the rules, which would also exclude time spent unloading cargo from hours of service rules and allow dispatchers to interrupt drivers' sleep time.

German work week rises

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's government and local authorities have reached an agreement with the Ver.di union giving more than 2 million public-sector workers one-time bonus payments instead of pay rises through 2007, while lengthening the work week for some. Under the deal, federal employees in western Germany will work 30 minutes longer each week and those in the east one hour less, giving both a 39-hour week. Local governments can implement a 40-hour week if they wish. State governments pulled out of the national agreement last year, increasing working hours from 38.5 to 40-42 hours a week.

The union also agreed to the introduction of performance-related pay, starting in 2007. Initially 1 percent of total wage budgets will be set aside for "merit pay"; a figure that will eventually rise to 8 percent. Pay bonuses based on marital status and number of children will be abolished.

Employers in the construction industry are also demanding longer hours, asking the IG BAU union to lengthen the work week to 42 hours from 39 hours without extra pay. Some 650,000 construction workers have lost their jobs in the last 11 years.

180 trillion wasted hours

A report in the Feb. 2 issue of the satirical weekly, *The Onion*, notes that more than 180 trillion leisure hours were lost to work in 2004. The article stresses "the pervasive nature of the problem, which ... affects 96 percent of employable Americans year-round."

"Week after week of potential relaxation time is squandered to jobs," notes a fictional expert in *The Onion* report. Oddly, the satirical journalist goes on to say that the average worker's ability to kick back "is basically nonexistent 49 weeks out of the year." Evidently, *Onion* staff get longer paid vacations than the average American.

If American workers had more time, the report suggests, they could use it sun bathing, sleeping in, taking walks, and cooking gourmet meals. It appears, from the tone of the article, that the author considers this absurd, un-American (the article refers to European hours in dismissive tones), and even slothful. Why we should have to work ever-longer hours, even as our increased productivity has long since made possible a 16-hour work week with abundance for all, is never explained.

Social insecurity...

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tional state can defeat it, no single campaign or mass protest can halt it. It is the machine logic of everyday life in a capitalist society, go to work, pay your debts, pay more and more just to survive, only to be told you are better off than someone else so shut up and accept it.

It is the perpetual war of those who have against those who have not, it is barbarism with a happy face. It is the phony reality of reality TV, while millions starve out of sight of the cable network cameras. Capitalism, like the vampire it is, will never stop squeezing even more profit out of each of us while assuring us its for our own good, telling us we should feel 'empowered', that we are stakeholders/shareholders in our own exploitation.

'For capitalism to survive it needs blood to suck' – Malcolm X

Workers world wide now face the same common enemy, the same assault everywhere Workers of the World Unite was never more meaningful. To stop capitalism we must refuse to produce the surplus value it so direly needs, we must organize a global social revolution to stake it firmly in its black heart. To do that we need to realize our class consciousness, not as consumers, or citizens but as proletarians, as the creators of capital. There is no capitalist who can exist without our labour, we are not cogs in the machine, we are the very machinery of capitalism, without us the machine will halt.

A longer version of this article, including links to supporting documents, can be found at http://plawiuk.blogspot.com/2005/02/social-insecurity-phony-pension-crisis.html

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Review: An economic hit man

BY JOHN GORMAN

John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. Barrett-Koehler Publications, $24.95.

John Perkins' book stands in a long and illustrious line of confessional books going back to St. Augustine's *Confessions* and running on through Casanova's autobiography and Thomas Merton's *Seven Story Mountain*, and has elements of all of them. Perkins' thoughts of quitting his job as economic hit man as early as 1982 in favor of the life he felt he should be leading, but always putting his misgivings aside, recall St. Augustine's "Oh God, make me chaste – but not yet!"

It was, as he himself admits, not only "threats and bribes" that convinced him to keep silence, but also his addiction to the posh life his situation opened to him. The catastrophe of 9/11 finally led him to put aside his misgivings and do his part to explain what causes were really at work in today's economic and political world. As he says, "The story of this particular economic hit man is the story of how we got to where we are and why we face crises that seem insurmountable."

Perkins is no conspiracy theorist. What is at the heart of these events is not a sinister group meeting in some back room to plan the destruction of the world, but "a concept that has been accepted as gospel: the idea that all economic growth benefits humankind and that the greater the growth the more widespread the benefits." As a corollary to this premise, it follows that "those who excel at stoking the fires of economic growth should be exalted and rewarded, while those born at the fringes are available for exploitation." It is the job of the economic hit man to turn these concepts into reality.

Perkins then explains how the hit man works. It was his job, first as an underling, then as manager of the Economics Department of the Power and Environmental Systems Division of MAIN, to go to Third World countries, analyze their economies, and make wildly optimistic forecasts of the benefits from huge projects to be constructed by American firms.

Cheered on by these prognostications, the country's leaders would borrow enormous sums from the World Bank to construct dams, power plants, factories and other installations, believing that the revenues generated by these operations would enable the nation to pay off the debt it had incurred. When these predictions failed to come true, the people were left with an unpayable debt that would keep them in poverty and dependency forever. Just servicing that debt consumes vast sums that might otherwise go to social services and help for the less fortunate. Defaulting would have terrible economic and political consequences and move the country from thralldom to virtual slavery to the International Monetary Fund. Since the hit man had never been in the service of the U.S. government, any misdeeds that might be uncovered could be laid at the door of corporate greed rather than American policy.

Even well-off counties like Saudi Arabia were vulnerable, Perkins says. They could be persuaded to invest their oil revenues in American bonds with the interest being used to finance huge projects constructed by firms like Bechtel and Halliburton, leaving the country dependent upon American technology and service. The very hint of withdrawal would be enough to cow any would-be nationalist. Any unpleasantness on the American side, like investigations of terrorist funding, would not be allowed to interrupt the gushers of oil and money.

If the hit man's persuasion did not work, Perkins explains, the "jackals" – CIA operatives, disloyal officers and even outright gangsters – would be called in to remove any leaders who stood in the way, as with Salvador Allende of Chile, Jaime Roldos of Ecuador and Omar Torrijos of Panama. As a last resort, the military would invade, as in Panama and Iraq, seize the country outright, and install more "cooperative" leadership – a lesson to anyone else planning to step out of line.

Behind all these machinations, Perkins tells us, stand not merely corporate greed but also a basic assumption that the days of the American Republic are gone, and it is time for an outright American Empire to control the world and its resources. "We decry slavery," the author reminds us, "but our global empire enslaves more people than the Romans and all the other colonial powers before us."

Although Perkins assures us that "empires never last," he is also mindful of the catastrophes their collapse often brought, and he fears the same for America as the Muslim world and native peoples everywhere rouse themselves to fight off this new Crusade. 9/11 is just the beginning.

This book is no wild-eyed rant; it has enough footnotes for any master's thesis. These *Confessions* demand to be taken seriously. If there is any serious weakness in the book, it is in the Epilogue where Perkins offers suggestions on what to do. Some are useful, others merely platitudinous. E.g., not having seen "The Corporation" before finishing his work, the writer remains naïve about the essential character of this institution and views it as a neutral force.

What I had hoped to find in these final pages was Perkins' own estimate of the situation – i.e., what are the real chances of successfully opposing this behemoth? Although, as he says, "this book is a confession, not a prescription," he still ascribes an almost magical power to mere words, being fond of comparing himself to Paul Revere on his midnight ride. But Revere's cry would have gone unheard, had there not been many colonists ready to act decisively when they heard the news. It would be very helpful to have the forecast of one as knowledgeable as he, to know which basket his eggs are in.

Attorney Lynne Stewart convicted in terror frame-up

BY MARK WOLFF

New York defense attorney Lynne Stewart was convicted Feb. 10 on five counts of conspiring to aid terrorists and lying to the U.S. government in a case many fear will undermine the ability of attorneys to defend clients charged with offenses under the Patriot Act. Co-defendants Abdel Sattar and Mohammed Yousry, translators to Arabic, were convicted on all charges by a federal jury after 11 days of deliberations.

The FBI raided Stewart's law office on April 8, 2002, seizing her confidential attorney's files. This is the first known case where an attorney has been convicted on terror charges simply for helping their client communicate with the outside world.

Questionable evidence was taken from secret surveillance of attorney-client conferences in a Minnesota prison where she worked with Sheik Abdel Rahman. The government secured a special federal warrant to monitor these communications in which the two discussed the political situation in Egypt as well as his survival in jail. Stewart says the discussion had a bearing upon her effort to influence Egyptian authorities to support Rahman's transfer to Egypt.

Since Rahman's conviction in connection with the first World Trade Center bombing, a Special Administrative Measure was imposed restricting his discussion of politics and his listening to correspondence from his followers. Sheik Rahman, blind and speaking only Arabic, has been kept incommunicado.

It's time for a labor-oriented paper

BY DAVE LINDORFF, COUNTERPUNCH

As a long-time professional journalist and labor activist, I have watched from the inside for thirty years now the constriction of the media and of the flow of information to the public – information which is critical to the function of a democracy.

We have reached a point today that half the people in this Land of the Free think that it was Iraqis who attacked the World Trade Center, when in fact not one Iraqi was among the suicidal terrorists on those planes; where half the people in America believe not only that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, but that the U.S. has found such weapons, when in fact there are none and were none; where half of American young people think that Social Security will be bankrupt before they reach retirement, where in fact no such thing will happen.

Important news is routinely blacked out or buried, while administration lies – such as Bush's latest whopper that "research" shows that children do better being raised in families where there is a mother and a father than in a gay household, or his much bigger whopper that the Social Security system is going "bankrupt" – are simply run as fact, with no effort to evaluate their veracity.

When it comes to reporting on critical issues facing working people – the flight of jobs overseas, the security of the retirement system, the destruction of the right to organize and join a union, declining job safety, environmental destruction, a safety net for the unemployed or underemployed – the situation is even worse. When the media do report on these topics, it is almost always from a management perspective. Attacks on Social Security are called "reform," just as the destruction of welfare was called "reform." The obvious mega-crisis of global warming is covered "even-handedly," giving know-nothing critics equal billing with the scientific community's warning of disaster as if it was commentary at a football game.

As for covering workers' views during labor disputes – forget it. There is hardly a labor reporter left in America, so most labor stories are now covered by the business desk, which takes management's perspective as a given.

In such a situation, it is no wonder that organized labor is being left out in the cold politically. No wonder that most Americans don't even really know what a labor union is. No wonder that in many people's minds, unions are seen as little more than gangs, or at best as just "special interests."

Yet the union leadership continues to squander untold millions of dollars on publicity campaigns, trying to get its story told in this biased and uninterested media.

It's time to take at least some of that money and put it to better use, by subsidizing the creation of an independent but pro-labor daily newspaper – a publication that would have its own reporters and would cover all the news in the country and the world from a perspective that takes working people and their viewpoints into account.

I propose that such a paper be published on-line, not on paper. Why? The cost of printing a newspaper and getting it delivered to millions of homes across the country, would be prohibitive, and the money would be better spend on having a crack staff of reporters and editors. These days, most working families have computers and online access, so there's really no need for paper. If the publication obtained a list of union members' email addresses, members could receive a brief news summary of the day's headlines each morning with a link to the publication.

Having the seed money for such a daily news journal come from the labor movement would free the publication from the constraints that have sapped the will and integrity of the corporate press. A few million dollars might seem like a lot of money to the unions, but since the many millions spent on publicity for the most part just go into media office wastebaskets, it's really not a big new expense – just a shifting of funds to a much more productive use.

The key to the success of such a publication would be its independence. It would have to move beyond the traditional captive labor media, and be ready and able to write critically about the labor movement when necessary. Without this independence, the venture would be doomed from the start.

As an independent, labor-funded daily, however, it could compel a renewal of the competing national corporate media, which would be forced to change or be exposed as biased or worse – captive of conservative politicians and corporate interests.

I envision a newspaper that would be so relevant to American workers' lives, covering not just politics, economics and labor, but sports and entertainment too, that it would be read every day, replacing the daily paper in most households.

Imagine the difference such an aggressive, independent media voice might have made in the 2002 run-up to the disastrous invasion of Iraq or in the recent election, or the impact it would have on the coming battle over Social Security. Imagine the impact it would have on progressive organizing in general!

Some union movement people – rank-and-file and leaders and particularly activists within the International Labor Communication Association – are starting to look into the possibility of such a venture, but there is really no time to wait.

Too much has been lost already because of the lack of an honest media in America. It's time for a labor-oriented daily newspaper.



Newcastle, UK: The British IWW Regional Organizing Committee and the National Union of Mineworkers are hosting a March 6 commemoration to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Industrial Workers of The World and the 20th anniversary of the end of the British Miners Strike.

Eddie Murray will speak on the history and current role of the IWW and NUM/IWW member David Douglass will speak on the miners strike and its aftermath at 1 p.m. at The Side Cinema, Newcastle. At 7 p.m., NUM National President Ian Lavery will speak on "The Miners Long Strike and where do the miners stand today?" at the Tyneside-Irish Centre in Gallowgate, Newcastle, followed by a theatrical presentation and labor songs. Admission to both events is free.

Providence, R.I.: The Rhode Island Labor History Society is hosting a conference beginning March 4 at 5 p.m. with a release party for Paul Buhle and Nicole Schulman's book, *Wobblies! A Graphic History* and for the new CD, "I Dreamed I Heard Joe Hill Last Night" by John Pietaro and the Flames of Discontent. John Nicholas Brown Center, 357 Benefit Street. Saturday, March 5 will see a day-long academic conference, "Beyond the Borders: The Legacy of the IWW, Organized Labor and the Multiracial Community Today" beginning at 9 a.m. at MacMillan Hall, Brown University. The events are free and open to the public.

Madison, Wisc.: The Madison General Membership Branch is presenting a program, The History and Philosophy of the IWW in Song, April 20 at the Center for Creative & Cultural Arts (306 W Dayton), begining at 7 p.m. On April 30, the same venue will host a Celebration of IWW Culture with music, poetry, theater and art.

For a calendar of events throughout the year see www.iww.org/projects/centennary

BOOKS FOR REBELLIOUS WORKERS



Singlejack Solidarity by Stan Weir

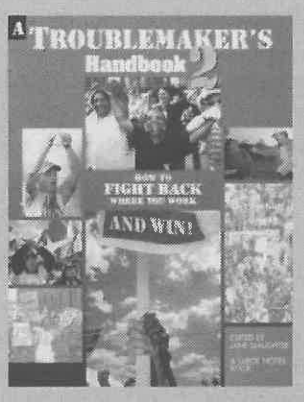
Edited and with an afterword by George Lipsitz
Foreword by Norm Diamond

Blue-collar intellectual and activist publisher, Stan Weir devoted his life to the advocacy of his fellow workers. Weir was both a thoughtful observer and an active participant in many of the key struggles that shaped the labor movement and the political left in postwar America. He reported firsthand from the front lines of decisive fights over the nature of unions in the auto industry, the resistance to automation on the waterfront, and battles over racial integration in the workplace and within unions themselves.

Written throughout Weir's decades as a blue-collar worker and labor educator, *Singlejack Solidarity* offers a rare look at modern life and social relations as seen from the factory, dockside, and the shop floor. This volume analyzes issues central to working-class life today, such as the human costs of automation, union policies, mass media images of work, and intergenerational relations in working-class families. It also provides humorous commentaries, historical vignettes, and moving portraits of people Weir encountered, including James Baldwin, C. L. R. James, and Eric Hoffer. Gathered here for the first time, Weir's writings are equal parts memoir, labor history, and polemic; taken together, they document a crucial chapter in the life story of working-class America. ***384 pages, $20.00***

A Troublemaker's Handbook 2: How To Fight Back Where You Work – And Win!

Edited by Jane Slaughter



A completely new update to the first edition, this unique resource of organizing and leadership lessons, tactics, and strategies is a collaboration of over 70 authors and hundreds of activists. No matter how seasoned an activist you are, this book will show you new ways to fight back where you work and win!

Chapters include: The Fight Starts at the Workplace, Shop Floor Tactics, Fighting Discrimination, Saving Good Jobs: Fighting Lean Production and Outsourcing, Alliances in the Community, Bringing Immigrants into the Movement, Workers Centers, Leadership Development and International Solidarity. ***378 pages, $24.00***

Just Passing Through by Paco Ignacio Taibo II

In this elegant and literate mystery adventure novel set in 1920's post-revolutionary Mexico, Paco Ignacio Taibo II is searching for a hero, specifically a leftist hero, and he thinks he has found him in the person of Sebastián San Vicente. But everyone, including the baffled novelist, is trying to figure out exactly who San Vicente really is. There is some record of San Vicente in FBI records during the Wilson era, and some mention of him in anarchist records and rumors, but the rest has to be filled in. And who better to do this than Taibo? Meanwhile, with Taibo busy in the background trying to resolve the mystery of his hero's identity, San Vicente goes about his heroic avocation of organizing strikes against the capitalists, dodging thugs and hiding out from the Mexican Army.

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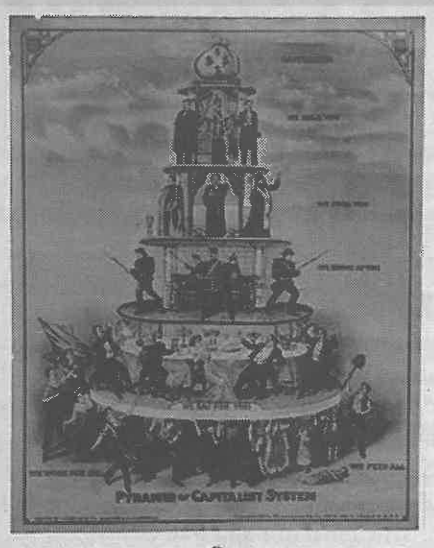


Heart of Spain: Robert Capa's Photographs of the Spanish Civil War

This coffee table-format book features stunning reproductions of over 100 of Robert Capa's photos, most featuring the militia on the front and at home, but also including several photos documenting the ways in which women played a key role in the struggle. Essays and poems give context to the photos. 199 pages, **$30.00**



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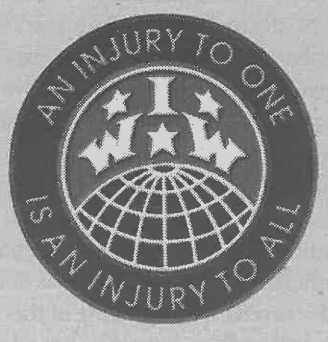


Pyramid of Capitalism poster. 17"x22" full color reproduction of the classic graphic **$7.50**

Punching Out & Other Writings by Martin Glaberman, edited & introduced by Staughton Lynd
A collection of writings by autoworker, historian and poet Marty Glaberman. This collection reprints Glaberman's classic writings on the union movement, Marxism, the challenges facing radical movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and a selection of labor poetry. Among the gems to be found are Egghead comics, an appreciation of C.L.R. James, and of course a reprint of the classic pamphlet on business unionism, Punching Out. Glaberman celebrated the possibilities of informal work groups both to resist capitalism and to run industry once we've dumped the bosses off our backs. 231 pages, ***$14.00***

Green Bans, Red Union, Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation
by Meredith and Verity Burgmann
At the height of the Australian building industry boom in the 1970s a remarkable union campaign stopped billions of dollars worth of indiscriminate development that was turning Australian cities into concrete jungles. Enraging employers and politicians but delighting many in the wider community, the members of the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation risked their jobs in order to preserve buildings, bush and parkland. The direct impact of this "green bans" movement can be seen all over Sydney. *Green Bans, Red Union* documents the development of a union that took direct action on a number of social issues. Apart from the green bans movement, union members also used their industrial power to support the rights of oppressed groups, such as Aborigines, women and homosexuals. In telling the colorful story that inspired many environmentalists and ordinary citizens, Meredith and Verity Burgmann open a window on a period when Australian workers led the world in innovative and stunningly effective forms of environmental protest.
352 pages, paperback, **$20.00**

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U.S. meat packers violate human rights

A new report by Human Rights Watch says that workers in the U.S. meat and poultry industry face serious danger of losing limbs, or even their lives, in unsafe work conditions. It also found that companies frequently deny workers' compensation to employees injured on the job, intimidate and fire workers who try to organize, and exploit workers' immigrant status in order to keep them quiet about abuses.

"Meat packing is the most dangerous factory job in America," said Lance Compa, a labor rights researcher for Human Rights Watch. "Dangerous conditions are cheaper for companies – and the government does next to nothing."

The 175-page report, "Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants," shows how the increasing speed of production coupled with close quarters, poor training and insufficient safeguards, have made meat and poultry work so hazardous. Meatpacking's injury rate of 20 injuries per 100 workers is more than three times that of American private industry over all.

While government agencies try to protect consumers from tainted meat, the report notes, a century after Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* was published, they still do little to protect workers from unsafe conditions.

An example of unlawful tactics discussed in the report are those Smithfield Foods has taken in response to organizing efforts at its massive pork-processing plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, where 5,000 workers slaughter, cut and package more than 25,000 hogs a day. In a 1997 union election, Smithfield's management fired union supporters, threatened plant closure, stationed police at plant gates to intimidate workers, and orchestrated an assault on union activists. On December 16, the NLRB ordered a new election, which Smithfield immediately appealed.

"The company has armed police walking around the plant to intimidate us," a Smithfield worker from El Salvador told Human Rights Watch. "It's especially frightening for those of us from Central America. Where we come from, the police shoot trade unionists."
The report is available at http://hrw.org/reports/2005/usa0105/

2005 Taco Bell Truth Tour

On March 12, farm workers and supporters will rally at Taco Bell owner Yum Brands' headquarters in Louisville, KY, demanding an end to sweatshops in the tomato fields of Immokalee, Florida. For the past three years, farm workers have crossed the country, speaking about the sweatshop conditions behind the tomatoes in Taco Bell's products.

Tomato pickers' piece rates have remained essentially unchanged since 1978, as growers insist they can not afford to improve conditions and buyers like Taco Bell insist the conditions under which the tomatoes are harvested are not their concern. This year, workers are bringing the truth about farm worker poverty to the home of fast-food profits, Yum Brands, the parent company of Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Long John Silvers and A&W Restaurants, with revenues of over $24 billion in 2003.

Yum Brands is the largest restaurant company in the world – larger than McDonald's – and wields tremendous influence in the corporate food industry. A strong turnout in Louisville March 12 is crucial to demonstrate to Yum that the Taco Bell boycott will not go away until farm workers in Yum's supply chain are treated with dignity and respect. *For more information: www.ciw-online.org*

Fired for smoking off the job

Michigan-based Weyco Inc. is now randomly testing workers to determine if they are smokers. Four workers who refused the test were fired. Weyco is one of a small but growing number of U.S. firms that refuse to hire smokers, usually in an effort to control health care costs.

World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

Solidarity with call center workers in Berlin

The Free Workers Union (FAU, German affiliate of the International Workers Association) is fighting German Telekom's treatment of outsourced workers. FAU activists organized a rally by laid-off call center workers outside Telekom offices Feb. 10.

Telekom outsourced its directory assistance work to MultiCom Services GmbH, located in Berlin-Spandau, four and a half years ago. MCS workers are forced to work unpaid hours, are spied on while on sick leave by private detectives, wages are routinely paid late... and on Jan. 31 the entire workforce was told it was being laid off, as Telekom had apparently found another contractor who could exploit its workers even more ruthlessly.

Security guards have prevented workers from meeting at the workplace to discuss the situation, but the FAU is demanding that Telekom take responsibility for the plight of the MCS employees. They insist that Telekom must rehire all laid-off workers and pay them Telekom's inhouse rates, in addition to the immediate payment of back pay and holiday pay owed to the workers.

Repression in Greece

The CNT-AIT of Spain held an international day of action January 5, demanding the dropping of all charges against their members and others arrested at the Tesalonica, Greece, demonstrations at the European Summit of Heads of State in June 2003. A CNT member is scheduled to stand trial Oct. 10.

Twenty-nine of 130 demonstrators arrested June 21, 2003, were charged with property damage, public disorder and weapons charges after a clash in which protestors defended themselves with placards and shouts against police assaults.

Italian rail workers strike against unsafe conditions

Nearly two-thirds of Italy's trains were halted Feb. 11 as rail workers struck to demand better rail safety measures, in the second such strike since five workers were killed (along with 12 passengers) in a Jan. 7 collision between a passenger train and a freight train near Bologna.

Unions defied Transport Minister Pietro Lunardis order that the strike be moved to Friday and cut to 8 hours in order to minimize its impact. Italy's dominant unions called the strike after a Jan. 12 strike called by independent unions and rank-and-file committees shut down trains across the country.

Workers cut off public works minister's water supplies

Two Harare, Zimbabwe, city workers who were ordered to disconnect water service to nonpaying residents have been suspended after cutting off Public Works Minister Ignatius Chombo, who utility records say owes nearly $3 million. Chombo had earlier suspended Harare's mayor and most of its councillors on the grounds that they were failing to deliver services to the capital's residents. Since then, municipal services have collapsed.

Sugar strike in third month

Despite a government back-to-work order and the massacre of several strikers and their children, picket lines are still up at the Hacienda Luisita sugar complex in the Philippines. With soldiers unable to restore production, management has resumed talks with union officials (they previously insisted on meeting with stooges appointed to "represent" the workers) even as the army says it considers the strike part of an armed insurgency. Workers are demanding pay hikes and reinstatement of scores of fired union activists; the Aquino family has refused to discuss reinstating the unionists.

U.S. workers undercutting Indian call center workers?

Communication Workers of America official Steve Tirza told *Asia Pulse* that call centre staff in India are better treated by their employers than in the US, where the workers are treated as a "commodity." He was visiting as part of a union team investigating conditions in India's call centre and IT industry.

Challenging the argument that many jobs are outsourced to India for cost-cutting purposes, he said that even while doing this, the salaries of CEOs in the U.S. get fatter and fatter, negating the cost advantage.

The U.S. delegation visited call centres and IT firms in cities such as Chennai, Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, and found that in many ways – particularly in terms of employee rights and social benefits – the system in India was better.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. growing numbers of companies are closing their call centers and replacing them with home-based workers who typically have no benefits and, because they have never met their coworkers, are in no position to organize.

Gijón, Spain: Shipyard workers battle riot police

Workers at the Naval Gijón shipyard, who have been engaged in a prolonged battle against privatization, clashed with police Jan. 27 as they defended barricades and refused to surrender the adjacent Poniente aquarium, a tourism-oriented complex which the workers have destroyed. One policeman was hospitalized in the clash, according to Indymedia.

Nepal coup hits workers hard

When Nepal's king mounted the second royal coup Feb. 4, ousting the elected government and placing the country under martial law, union officials were forced into hiding as police hunted down dissidents.

As the coup unfolded, the Asia and Pacific Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was convening its regional conference in Katmandu. Rather than taking action to defend workers being attacked in the streets outside their luxury hotel, the organization issued a statement a week later expressing its "serious concern." There was no call for international protests, let along for industrial action in solidarity with Nepal's besieged workers.

Greece bars cyber-snoops

Greece's Data Protection Authority, whose decisions are binding, has ordered employers not to violate their workers' privacy by snooping into their private e-mails and other communications or monitoring computers through surveillance software.

Germany orders jobless woman to work as prostitute

A 25-year-old waitress who turned down a job providing "sexual services" at a brothel in Berlin has been told her unemployment benefits may be cut off.

German law now requires workers to accept any available job or lose their benefits, and since prostitution is now legal brothels fit the bill. The government had considered allowing workers to refuse employment in brothels on moral grounds, but decided that it would set a bad precedent and be too difficult to distinguish them from bars.

Argentine subway strikers win

BY BENJAMIN DANGL
WWW.UPSIDEDOWNWORLD.ORG

Since the economic collapse of the country in 2002, many Argentines have developed their own alternatives to capitalist policies and practices. From barter systems to worker-run factories and businesses, in the face of economic hardship many citizens have taken things into their own hands. The most recent example of this resistance took place Feb. 5-10 in Buenos Aires.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens use the Metrovias subway each day. So when the subway workers went on strike, it created quite a stir. Since November 2004, the workers have been demanding pay increases of 53% and better working conditions. After months of waiting for the company executives to meet their demands, the workers decided to go on strike... and they won.

Workers blocked all subway stops throughout the city. Many were on guard for 24-hour shifts at time, others had their whole families with them and slept on the concrete floor. There were some fights between Metrovias workers and angry citizens who didn't support the strike. In some cases enraged commuters broke the glass cases surrounding ticket counters.

Like many Argentine citizens, Metrovias workers struggle to survive on a meager salary. Meanwhile, the company's vice-president, Alberto Verra receives 86 times the annual income of most workers. "I make about 300 pesos per month," one Metrovias worker explained. "That's about 100 U.S. dollars. It's simply not enough for my family and I to survive on."

Metrovias, which is a U.S.-owned company, receives approximately US$2,500 per hour for the maintenance of the subway. In spite of this, the company has not performed general maintenance since 2001 and employees complain of unhealthy working conditions, horrible air quality and faulty equipment. Though the price of tickets has risen over the years, the salaries have basically remained the same.

Since the 1990s, due to a lack of wage increases in Argentina, people across the economic spectrum have been forced to work beyond an eight hour day in order survive. However, in 2003 and 2004, the subway workers fought long and hard to gain a six hour work day, and they were successful. (Ten years ago, they had a six hour workday when the subway was state-owned, but lost that when the company was sold to Metrovias.) Though this success inspired some, the workers in other sectors that are fighting for six hour work days are still a minority. Currently, the subway workers are more democratic and often more radical than other unions, and so have fought and gained more.

As a result of the lack of subway service this week, the buses were abnormally packed throughout the week and lines remained on the sidewalks long into the evening. As many Buenos Aires residents were quick to point out, the subway strike was a huge inconvenience. "Thousands of working people are being forced to arrive late to their jobs, and so they lose money. This loss can be huge for people who depend on every cent to survive," one kiosk worker in the city's center explained.

In a poll conducted by *Clarin*, a major newspaper in Buenos Aires, 67.6% said they were against the subway workers' strike.

However, the strike could be the first step in a longer fight for workers' rights in the country. A conference among the city's major unions recently took place in Hotel Bauen, a worker-run cooperative that was occupied by previous employees after its closure in 2002. At the front of the conference hall, a sign read "Si Gana el Subte, Ganamos Todos." (If the subway workers win, we all win.) There was fervor in the air, and a feeling that it was time to make the most of the strike's clout. Representatives from student groups to telephone worker unions were in attendance. Many proposed a citywide strike demanding higher wages in general, others suggested more street protests and road blockades.

The end of the conflict came February 10th when the Metrovias workers accepted an offer from the company for a pay increase of 44 percent. Improvements on the working conditions of the subway are still being discussed. Yet for many of the workers, the wage increase was a victory and could serve as an inspirational example to other workers in the city.

Bolivians oust private water contractor

BY ROBERT NASH,
WAR ON WANT



Bolivian President Carlos Mesa announced the immediate cancellation of Aguas del Illimani's contract in response to protests, a general strike and a blockade sealing off all roads to the Bolivian capital La Paz.

The protests were the culmination of campaigns by community groups outraged at the failure of the company to live up to its promises and determined to force the government to take the water company back into public hands.

The water and sanitation company (owned by French water giant Suez Lyonnaise and numerous minority shareholders) was privatised in 1997 and received $68.2 million as part of a World Bank project to encourage private-sector involvement in the city of El Alto's infrastructure. Declan Duff, of the World Bank's International Finance Corporation, said the project "highlights the vital role of the private sector in providing future infrastructure service."

The economic and social consequences of water privatization have been dire for Bolivians. Since privatization, water prices have risen by 35 percent in El Alto – devastating in a region where 40 percent of residents live in conditions of extreme poverty – while lack of access to clean water is a major cause of child illness in Bolivia.

The company left more than 200,000 people with no access to water at all. The experience of these people is in stark contrast to a 2003 World Bank report stating that, "coverage of water and electricity services has come close to universal, while coverage of sewerage... has significantly improved."

The decision comes five years after the Cochabamba revolt, when U.S.-based energy company Bechtel was forced to leave another high-profile World Bank-funded privatized water project.

Since 2001 Bechtel has been involved in a lawsuit demanding $25 million in compensation from the Bolivian government (an amount far in excess of estimates of the costs they incurred). The outcome of this legal action is still unclear. It must be hoped that Suez will be unable or unwilling to take similar actions if the Bolivian government succeeds in terminating their contract. The costs of water privatization to the Bolivian people are already apparent and they can surely not afford to compensate those involved in ill-advised and unsuccessful privatization projects from their own pockets.